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*By the same Author*

- THE SCEPTIC (*Psychic Play*)
- REVELATIONS OF A SPIRIT MEDIUM (Joint Editor with  
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- COLD LIGHT ON SPIRITUALISTIC 'PHENOMENA'
- STELLA C.: AN ACCOUNT OF SOME ORIGINAL EXPERI-  
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- THE HAUNTING OF CASEBEN'S GAP: A MODERN 'MIRACLE'  
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- FAITH AND FIRE-WALKING (*Encyclopædia Britannica*)
- A REPORT ON TWO EXPERIMENTAL FIRE-WALKS







walking over red-hot embers during first fire-walk  
r held in Great Britain, September 9, 1935.

*(See page 369)*

# CONFESSIONS OF A GHOST-HUNTER

BY

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PUTNAM

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## Contents

	PAGE
FOREWORD - - - - -	7
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
I. THE GHOST THAT STUMBLED - - - - -	15
II. THE MOST HAUNTED HOUSE IN ENGLAND - - - - -	25
III. SOME ADVENTURES IN HAUNTED HOUSES - - - - -	36
IV. THE STRANGE EXPLOITS OF A LONDON POLTER- GEIST - - - - -	55
V. 'GRAND HOTEL' AND OTHER MYSTERIES - - - - -	65
VI. THE TALKING MONGOOSE - - - - -	85
VII. SOME CURIOUS CLAIMS TO MEDIUMSHIP - - - - -	98
VIII. FROM KENSINGTON TO THE PLANET MARS - - - - -	117
IX. THE STRANGE CASE OF MADAME X - - - - -	131
X. HOW TO TEST A MEDIUM - - - - -	140
XI. SECRETS OF 'SPIRIT' PHOTOGRAPHY - - - - -	168
XII. CONVINCING EXPERIMENTS WITH A FRENCH CLAIRVOYANTE - - - - -	209
XIII. RUDI SCHNEIDER: THE LAST PHASE - - - - -	226
XIV. NEW LIGHT ON THE ABRAMS 'MAGIC BOX'? - - - - -	237
XV. STAGE TELEPATHY AND VAUDEVILLE 'PHENO- MENA' - - - - -	253
XVI. A CLEVER AMERICAN HYPERÆSTHETE - - - - -	278
XVII. A TYROLEAN NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT - - - - -	286
XVIII. ADVENTURES WITH A SHOWMAN-HYPNOTIST - - - - -	297
XIX. 'THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES' - - - - -	312
XX. PALE BLACK MAGIC - - - - -	322

XXI. 'I HAVE SEEN THE INDIAN ROPE TRICK' - -	344
XXII. HOW I BROUGHT THE FIRE-WALK TO ENGLAND -	355
INDEX - - - - -	383

## *List of Illustrations*

Kuda Bux walking over red-hot embers during first fire-walk ever held in Great Britain, September 9, 1935 - - - - -	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
The author's ghost-hunting kit - - - - -	32
Madame Eugénie Picquart in the impersonations of (1) 'Coquelin'; (2) an old French judge; (3) Mephistopheles; (4) Egyptian mummy - - -	102
'Spirit' photographs of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, etc., showing cut-out effect - - - - -	178
Effect of radio-active minerals on a sealed box of photographic plates - - - - -	204
Marion 'finding' a pre-selected playing card - - -	254
Marion psychometrising a letter - - - - -	262
'Sentry-box' apparatus used in Marion experiments -	266
Marion making a 'trial' of a tin box as to whether it contains a hidden object - - - - -	272
Plywood shroud and visor, constructed for tests with Marion - - - - -	276
Kuda Bux, blindfolded, duplicating shorthand characters drawn on a blackboard - - - - -	316
Mr. Harry Price on the site of the Brocken <i>Goethejahr</i> experiment - - - - -	338
Karachi and his son, Kyder, performing the Indian rope trick - - - - -	348
Kuda Bux's feet being medically examined by physician immediately before final fire-walk, September 17, 1935 - - - - -	364

*List of Illustrations*

	PAGES
Mr. Digby Moynagh attempting the fire-walk at final test, September 17, 1935 - - - - -	364
Kuda Bux's feet, quite uninjured, after first fire-walk, September 9, 1935 - - - - -	370
Kuda Bux performing the fire-walk at final test, September 17, 1935 - - - - -	374

*Illustrations in the Text*

	PAGE
The Martian alphabet, complete - - - - -	126
Signature of Oomaruru - - - - -	126
'Thank you!' in Maruan - - - - -	126
Head of Pawleenoos, 'cultured Martian giant' - - - - -	127
'Symphonic chant' of the Martians - - - - -	127
Detector used in radio experiments - - - - -	243
Kuda Bux's signatures, in Kashmiri characters - - - - -	313
Collection of eighteenth-century Sussex love-tokens, charms, or witch-scarers (reduced) - - - - -	325
Reproduction of handbill of James Hallett, the Sussex charlatan. Note the reference to the cure of Witchcraft. Chichester, 1795-97 - - - - -	327
Reproduction of halfpenny bronze token of James Hallett, the Sussex charlatan - - - - -	328

## Foreword

The science of investigating alleged abnormal phenomena has, like most other sciences, advanced by leaps and bounds during the last few years. Before the War a back parlour, a red lamp, a circle of credulous sitters and a vivid imagination were all that was thought necessary in order to 'investigate' a medium. Of course, psychic science made no progress. The methods of these researchers were derided by official science and orthodoxy refused to listen to them.

But with the War came a change. A wave of interest in the possibility of an after-life swept the country like a tornado. This interest was purely emotional, based as it was on the fact that tens of thousands of the flower of our manhood were being shot down. Relatives mourned them, but with their grief was the hope—almost the belief—that their sons, though dead, would survive in another world. The ranks of the spiritualists overflowed with those who hoped. . . .

But the great wave of emotion that swept the country carried on its crest a few sane people who, while admitting the possibility of an after-life, demanded that the alleged phenomena said to be produced in the *séance*-room should be scientifically investigated by qualified and unbiased persons. To meet this demand I founded (1925) the National Laboratory of Psychical Research which, in June 1934, was taken over by the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation. Most of the cases recorded in these *Confessions* were investigated by me as Director of the National Laboratory.

Where shall we go when we die? I am afraid there is nothing in this volume that will supply an answer. The answer *may* be



there, but perhaps I cannot read it. For thirty years I have been engaged upon an intensive quest as to what happens after death, and the solution of the eternal problem still eludes me. The spiritualists will tell you that they have evidence that the soul, ego, or personality not only survives the grave, but that the dis-carnate entities of their loved ones 'come back' and converse with them through a person of abnormal sensibility who is called a 'medium'. My reply to the spiritualists is that, though I admit some of the phenomena which they obtain at *séances*, there is no scientific proof of survival. The evidence upon which the supporters of the spirit hypothesis base their claims is obtained principally through 'mental' mediums (such as clair-voyants) who purport to interpret supernormally the voices of those who, as they term it, have 'passed over'. Let me say at once that much of the evidence obtained through clairvoyants and trance mediums is very impressive; that is, impressive as to the abnormality of the communications which they deliver in a state of what is called a trance—though what a mediumistic trance is, no one knows, and it cannot be tested.

But I cross swords with the spiritualists as to the *causation* of the phenomena which we both admit. I am told that the 'messages', etc., obtained through an entranced psychic are 'evidential'. I agree, but evidential of what? They are evidential only of their abnormality—not that they were uttered by, or inspired by, the spirits of those who were once living.

Our knowledge of the conscious mind is really very limited; our ignorance of the subconscious mind is profound. Is it, then, very remarkable that science suggests that these so-called spirit messages (even when uttered by mediums who are honest) may come from the subconscious mind of the entranced medium, or (by telepathy) from the conscious or subconscious mind of the sitters? Unfortunately, we have no scientific evidence that even telepathy is a fact. But, the spiritualists argue, the mediums tell us things which were unknown both to themselves and their

sitters. This I am prepared to admit, but does that prove spirit origin? Of course it does nothing of the kind; it proves merely that the medium has, in some obscure way, obtained knowledge unknown to any person present at the *séance*. It does *not* prove survival.

Assuming that the information obtained abnormally was known only to a dead person, that, too, would not prove survival, or that there are spirits: but it might prove the existence of what has been termed the 'psychic factor'.<sup>1</sup> The psychic factor has been suggested as an intangible 'something' possessed by a person which may survive the grave. The theory is that, at death, this psychic factor (not to be confused with the soul or personality) may linger on awhile and, under certain conditions, combine with the mind of an entranced medium. From this combination—it is suggested—*emerges* another mind, made up partly from the mind of the medium and partly from that 'something' which once belonged to the dead person. This theory has been termed the 'emergent theory'. Assuming that there is any truth in the 'emergent theory', it is very easy to see how an entranced medium's utterances may include facts known only to a dead person; but it does not prove the survival of the soul, ego, or personality. And obviously it does not prove that the dead can return to earth, and behave like the living.

In my work, *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*,<sup>2</sup> I gave several instances of how the most extraordinary information, alleged to emanate from the spirits of dead persons, was received by a medium in trance. The most striking incident was where the alleged spirit of Lieutenant Irwin came back within forty-eight hours of the crashing of the R.101 airship and gave

<sup>1</sup>See *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, by C. D. Broad, London, 1925. (The Turner Lectures, delivered in Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1923.) The author suggests an 'emergent theory' based on an assumed 'psychic factor'.

<sup>2</sup>Gollancz, London, 1933.

a circumstantial, detailed, and highly technical account<sup>1</sup> of the disaster. The psychic was Mrs. Garrett, the British trance medium, who does not know one end of an airship from the other. The sitters present at the *séance* were also quite ignorant of such a highly-specialised business as navigating an airship; yet 'Lieutenant Irwin' gave particulars of the R.101 which were semi-official secrets, and which were afterwards confirmed at the public inquiry. Where did the information come from? From the spirit of Irwin? Perhaps, but we cannot prove it.

Another problem that confronts the dispassionate investigator is the contradictory accounts of how and where spirits dwell. Sir Oliver Lodge's 'Raymond'<sup>2</sup> gives us a picture of life in the Summerland that appears very little different from our condition on earth. He describes the same pains and pleasures experienced by mortals, and no normal person would make undue haste to join him. And it must be admitted that Raymond imparts to us no knowledge that can be regarded as transcendental. Another 'spirit' will give us a totally different description of, obviously, a totally different place. It will talk of 'spheres', where the discarnate advance in stages towards some goal. Some other medium will tell an entirely different story as to what happens when we 'pass on'. And the accounts of Summerland as we hear them to-day differ from those which were recorded fifty years ago. Can we doubt that these descriptions of the after-life are drawn from the conscious or subconscious mind of the medium who happens to be relating the story?

I repeat that nothing transcendental has ever been received from any spirit who has 'returned'. We have discovered no discarnate Shakespeare or Michelangelo; not one iota has been

<sup>1</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, pp. 118-32.

<sup>2</sup>See: *Raymond: or, Life After Death*, by Sir Oliver Lodge, London [1916]; also *Raymond: Some Criticisms*, by Viscount Halifax, London, 1917; and *Some Revelations as to 'Raymond': an Authoritative Statement by a Plain Citizen*, London [c. 1916]

added to our art, literature, or learning. On the contrary, most of the stuff that trance mediums pour forth is the veriest twaddle. Even the spiritualists themselves are beginning to realise this, just as the more reputable spiritualist journals are now ruthlessly exposing the fraudulent medium who batters on the credulity of the ignorant and the wretchedness of the bereaved.

Although I have emphasised that we have no scientific proof of 'survival', I must admit that the spirit hypothesis can be made to explain many of those mysteries, both in and out of the *séance*-room, which have intrigued me for so many years. Some of the cases recorded in this volume become more intelligible if the reader is a spiritualist. Such curious incidents as 'the ghost that stumbled', the London *Poltergeist*, the most haunted house, the ghost of the Unter den Linden, my disturbed night in the sleeping-car, and the adventures in haunted houses, can all be explained if one is prepared to admit that the dead can return and manifest in the same way as the living. But is that the answer? I wonder. As yet there is no answer, though a number of scientists and others, and certain universities, are trying to supply one.

I have endeavoured to make these *Confessions* as diverse as possible. I have also tried to make them readable. For those who want more detailed, technical and analytical reports of certain of the cases (some of which were published in *The Listener* during the summer of 1935), the original protocols are available. But they are of more interest to the student than the general reader. Almost the entire gamut of alleged abnormal manifestations can be found within the two covers of this volume. From fire-walking to hysteriacs, and from a 'talking mongoose' to a trip to Mars (*via* the *séance*-room) the reader has a wide choice of 'miracles' to choose from. I have purposely refrained from stressing the seamy side of spiritualism. The public is sick and tired of the fraudulent 'psychic' and his rather stale tricks. If I

have devoted little space to the charlatan, I have described at some length the attractive entertainments of the vaudeville 'medium' whose clever and instructive performances have been rather neglected by experimenters. The work of such men as Marion, Kuda Bux, Dr. McIvor-Tyndall, Maloitz, etc., will, I am sure, be a revelation to the uninitiated. Finally, I hope the chapter on how to test a medium will prove of real value to those readers whose interest in psychical research is active rather than academic.

H. P.

# CONFESSIONS OF A GHOST-HUNTER



## I. *The Ghost that Stumbled*

My first 'ghost' was made of cardboard. I will hasten to explain that it was the 'property' spectre of a three-act psychic play, 'The Sceptic', which I wrote and produced<sup>1</sup> when I was still a schoolboy. Of course I took the principal part myself, and I am sure I played the hero with considerable histrionic verve!

The reason I mention my early attempt at portraying the supernatural is because 'The Sceptic' was the dramatised record of a remarkable experience which befell me when I investigated my first haunted house.

As a member of an old Shropshire family, I spent nearly all my holidays and school vacations in a little village—in fact, a hamlet—which I will call Parton Magna. In Parton Magna is the old Manor House, *circa* A.D. 1600. It had been purchased by a retired canon of the Church of England, and his wife. There were rumours that the place was haunted—but popular tradition provides a ghost for every old country house, especially if a tragedy has taken place within it.

Within a very few weeks of the canon's settling down with his household in their new home, reports were received of curious happenings in the stables and out-buildings. Though fastened securely overnight, stable doors were found ajar in the morning. Animals were discovered untethered and wandering; pans of milk were overturned in the dairy, and utensils scattered about. The woodshed received the attentions of the nocturnal visitant nearly every night. Piles of logs neatly

<sup>1</sup>At the Amersham Hall, Lewisham, on Friday, Dec. 2, 1898. For description, see *South London Press*, Dec. 10, 1898.



stacked were found scattered in the morning, in spite of the fact that the door of the shed was kept locked. The manifestations in the woodshed became so frequent and troublesome that it was decided to keep watch. This was done on several evenings, a farm-hand secreting himself behind a stack of logs. Upon every occasion when a watch was kept on the wood, nothing happened *inside* the shed. On those nights when the shed was watched from within, pebbles were flung on to the corrugated iron roofing, the noise they made rolling down the metal being plainly heard. Then a watch was kept both inside and outside of the shed, but no one was seen, though the pebbles were heard as before. The experienced reader will recognise in my narrative a *Poltergeist* case running true to type.

The disturbances around the house continued with unabated vigour week after week until even local interest waned somewhat. Then, quite suddenly, they almost ceased, the disturbing entity transferring its activities to the inside of the mansion, which I will now describe.

The Manor House was built for comfort, though it has been restored at various times. From the large hall a wide staircase leads to a landing. At the top of the stairs (of which there are about fifteen—but I am speaking from memory) is, or was, a solid oak gate placed across to prevent dogs from roaming over the whole house. The staircase I have mentioned leads to the more important rooms opening out of a short gallery.

The first indication received by the canon and his family that the entity had turned its attention to the interior of the house was a soft 'pattering' sound, as of a child's bare feet running up and down the wide passage or gallery. The noises were at first taken to be those caused by a large bird or small animal out of the fields; a watch was kept, but investigation proved fruitless. These same noises were heard night after night, but nothing could be discovered. Then the maids commenced complaining that the kitchen utensils were being disturbed, usually during

their absence, in the daytime especially. Pots and pans would fall off shelves for no ascertainable reason when a maid was within a few feet of them, but always when her back was turned. I do not remember its being proved that a person actually *saw* a phenomenal happening of any description, though many were heard. Another curious circumstance connected with this case was the disturbing entity's fondness for raking out the fires during the night. The danger of fire from this cause was so obvious that, before retiring to rest, the canon's wife had water poured on the dying embers.

Like every old country house worthy of the name, the Manor, Parton Magna, had a 'history' which at the period of my story was being sedulously discussed by the villagers. The story is that the house was built by a rich recluse who, through an unfortunate *affaire de cœur*, decided to retire from the world and its disappointments. A niece, who acted as *châtelaine*, looked after the old man and managed his servants. One night, some few years after their settlement at the Manor House, the recluse became suddenly demented, went to his niece's apartment and, with almost superhuman strength, strangled the girl in bed. After this most unavuncular act the old man left the house, spent the night in the neighbouring woods and at day-break threw himself into the river that runs through the fields near the house. The legend, like the *Poltergeist*, also runs true to type. Like most traditions, there is a gram of truth in the story, the fact being that many years previously a girl named Mary Hulse had died at the Manor under suspicious circumstances.

It can be imagined that the canon's health was suffering under the anxiety caused by the disturbing events I have recorded above, and he was persuaded to leave the house for at least a short period. This was in the early autumn. On my way back to school for the Michaelmas term I broke my journey at Parton Magna in order to stay a few days with our friends, who then

made me acquainted with the state of affairs at the Manor House; in fact, it was the principal topic of conversation. The canon and his household had by then vacated their home temporarily, the premises being looked after by the wife of one of the cowmen. What really drove the family out was the fact that the nocturnal noises were becoming greater; in particular, a steady thump, thump, thump (as of someone in heavy boots stamping about the house), disturbing the rest of the inmates night after night. I decided I would investigate, and invited a boy friend to join me in the adventure.

Permission to spend a night in the Manor was easily obtained from the woman (who lived in a cottage near the house) who was looking after the place, and doubtless she regarded us as a couple of mad schoolboys who would have been much better in bed.

I must confess that I had not the slightest idea what we were going to do, or going to see, or what I ought to take with me in the way of apparatus. But the last question was very soon settled because all I had with me was a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -plate Lancaster stand camera. On the morning of the adventure I cycled into the nearest town and bought some magnesium powder, a bell switch, a hank of flex wire, two Daniell's batteries and some sulphuric acid. A big hole was made in my term's pocket money! In the afternoon I assembled my batteries and switch and prepared the flash powder by means of which I hoped to photograph—*something!* So that there should be no unwillingness on the part of the magnesium to 'go off' at the psychological moment, I extracted the white smokeless gunpowder from four or five sporting cartridges and mixed it with the magnesium powder. By a lucky chance I had with me a delicate chemical balance which I was taking back to school. With the weights was a platinum wire 'rider' which I inserted in the electrical circuit in order to ignite the magnesium flash-powder. With the above-mentioned impedimenta, a box of matches, some candles, a

stable lantern, a piece of chalk, a ball of string, a box of rapid plates, a parcel of food, the camera and accessories and (forbidden luxury!) some cigarettes, we bade a tender farewell to our friends and made our way across the fields to the Manor House, where we arrived at about 9.30 p.m.

The first thing we did when we reached our destination was to search every room and attic, and close and fasten every window. We locked the doors of those rooms which were capable of being treated in this manner and removed the keys. The doors leading to the exterior of the house were locked, bolted and barred, and chairs or other obstacles piled in front of them. We were determined that no material being should enter the portals without our cognisance. After we had searched every nook and cranny of the building, we established ourselves in the morning-room, locked the door and waited for something—or somebody—to 'turn up'. Our only illumination was the light of the stable lantern which we placed on the table.

At about half-past eleven, when we were beginning to get very sleepy and wishing (though we did not admit it) that we were in our nice warm beds, my friend thought he heard a noise in the room overhead (the traditional apartment of the unfortunate Mary Hulse). I, too, had heard a noise, but concluded it was caused by a wandering rodent or the wind. It did not sound an unusual noise. A few minutes later there was a 'thud' in the room above which left nothing to the imagination. It sounded as if someone had stumbled over a chair. I will not attempt to describe our feelings at the discovery that we were not alone in the house: for a moment or so we were almost paralysed with fear. But, remembering what we were there for, we braced up our nerves and waited. Just before midnight we again heard a noise in the room above; it was as if a heavy person were stamping about in clogs. A minute or so later the footfalls sounded as if they had left the room and were traversing the short gallery. Then they approached the head of the

stairs, paused at the dog-gate (which we had securely fastened with string), and commenced descending the stairs. We distinctly counted the fifteen 'thumps' corresponding to the number of stairs—and I need hardly mention that our hearts were 'thumping' in unison. 'It' seemed to pause in the hall when the bottom of the stairs was reached, and we were wondering what was going to happen next. The fact that only a door intervened between us and the mysterious intruder made us take a lively interest in what its next move would be. We were not kept long in suspense. The entity, having paused in the hall for about three minutes, turned tail and stumped up the stairs again, every step being plainly heard. We again counted the number of 'thumps', and were satisfied that 'it' was at the top of the flight—where again a halt was made at the dog-gate. But no further noise was heard when this gate had been reached. My friend and I waited at the door for a few minutes more, and then we decided to investigate the neighbourhood of the dog-gate and Mary Hulse's room. But we had barely formed this resolution before we heard the 'thumps' descending the stairs again. With quickened pulse I again counted the fifteen heavy footsteps, which were getting nearer and nearer and louder and louder. There was another pause in the hall, and again the foot-falls commenced their upward journey. But by this time the excitement of the adventure was making us bolder; we were acquiring a little of that contempt which is bred by familiarity. We decided to have a look at our quarry, if it were tangible, so with my courage in one hand and the camera in the other, I opened the door. My friend was close behind with the stable lantern. By this time the 'ghost' was on about the fifth stair, but with the opening of the door leading into the hall the noise of its ascent stopped dead.

Realising that the 'ghost' was as frightened of meeting us as we were of seeing it (although that is what we had come for), we thought we would again examine the stairs and the upper

part of the house. This we did very thoroughly, but found nothing disturbed. The dog-gate was still latched and tied with string. To this day I am wondering whether 'it' climbed over the gate (easily accomplished by a mortal), or whether it slipped through the bars. I think we were disappointed at not seeing anything we could photograph, so decided to make an attempt at a flashlight picture if the *Poltergeist* would descend the stairs again.

For my stand for the flash-powder I utilised some household steps about six feet high which we found in the kitchen. I opened out the steps and placed them about twelve feet from the bottom of the stairs. On the top of the steps in an old Waterbury watch-case I placed a heaped-up eggcupful of the magnesium-cum-gunpowder mixture—enough to photograph every ghost in the county! But in my simple enthusiasm I was running no risks of under-exposure. I placed the Daniell's batteries in the morning-room, and connected them up with the magnesium powder on the steps and the bell-push on the floor of the room, the wire flex entering the room under the door. In the heap of powder I had buried my platinum 'rider' which was interposed in the electrical circuit.

The exact position as to where we should photograph the entity presented some difficulty. We were not quite sure what happened to it when it reached the hall, so we decided to make an attempt at photographing it when it was ascending or descending the stairs. We decided on the former position, arguing (which shows how simple we were!) that the 'ghost' would have become less suspicious of us by the time it was on its return journey! I stationed my friend on the seventh or eighth stair (I forget which), and he held a lighted match which I accurately focused on the ground-glass of my Lancaster *Le Méritoire* camera, which I placed on one of the treads of the steps. I inserted the dark-slide, withdrew the flap, uncapped the lens, and then all was ready. The whole thing was rather mad,

of course, but the reader must remember that we were very young, with no experience of *Poltergeist* photography.

By the time we had fixed up the camera and examined the connections it was about half-past one. During the time we were moving about the hall not a sound was heard from above-stairs. Having arranged everything to our satisfaction, we returned to the morning-room, locked the door again and extinguished the lantern. Then we lay upon the carpet near the door, with the pear-push in my hand, and commenced our vigil.

It must have been nearly an hour before we heard anything, and again it was from the Mary Hulse room that the noises emanated. The sounds were identical to those we had previously heard: as if someone in clogs were treading heavily. Shortly after, the 'thumps' could be heard approaching the dog-gate and again 'it' paused at the top of the stairs. The pause was greater than the previous one, and for a minute or so we thought the *Poltergeist* had come to the end of its journey; but no, it passed over—or through—the dog-gate and commenced stumping down the stairs again. Having reached the hall the visitant stopped, and in my mind's eye I could picture it examining the arrangements we had made for securing its photograph. Then we thought we heard the steps moved. In order to get the camera square with the stairs I had taken a large book—using it as a set-square—and drawn on the tiled floor a chalk line parallel with the stairs. Exactly against this line I had placed the two front feet of the steps.

During the next five or six minutes we heard no movement in the hall. Then suddenly 'it' started its return journey. With our hearts beating wildly and with suppressed excitement we lay on the floor counting the slow, measured 'thumps' as they ascended the stairs. At the seventh 'thump' I pressed the button of my pear-push and—a most extraordinary thing happened, which is rather difficult to describe on paper. At the moment of

the explosion the 'ghost' was so startled that it involuntarily stumbled on the stairs, as we could plainly hear, and then there was silence. At the same moment there was a clattering down the stairs as if the spontaneous disintegration of the disturbing entity had taken place. The flash from the ignition of the powder was so vivid that even the morning-room from which we were directing operations was lit up by the rays coming from under the door, which was rather ill-fitting.

It would be difficult to say who was the more startled—the *Poltergeist* or myself, and for some moments we did nothing. After our astonishment had subsided somewhat, we opened the door and found the hall filled with a dense white smoke in which we could hardly breathe. We re-capped the camera, re-lit our lantern, and made a tour of inspection. The first thing we noticed was that the steps were shifted slightly out of the square. Whether 'it' moved the steps (as we thought at the time), or whether the shock of the explosion was responsible (which is doubtful), we could not determine. The Waterbury watch-case had disappeared with my platinum 'rider', and I have never seen the latter from that day to this. The watch-case we found eventually on the second stair from the bottom. What happened to it was apparently this: through the extremely rapid conversion of the gunpowder and magnesium into gases, and the concavity of the interior periphery of the case tending to retain the gases, the case was converted into a projectile, the very active propellant shooting it towards the stairs (the force of the explosion happening to send it in that direction), which it must have hit at about the spot where the entity was ascending—surely the only recorded instance of a 'ghost' having a watch-case fired at it, and it has been suggested that I call this narrative 'How I "shot" my first *Poltergeist*!' The sound of the watch-case falling was the rattling noise we heard when we thought we should find our quarry lying in pieces at the foot of the staircase. We immediately developed the plate,



but nothing but an over-exposed picture of the staircase was on the negative.

The Manor House continued to be the centre of psychic activity for some months after our curious adventure, but the disturbances became gradually less frequent, and eventually ceased. Fate decreed that some years later I should spend very many happy weeks in the house. If sometimes during that period my heart beat faster than its accustomed rate, the cause was *not* a supernatural one! Suffice it to say that I did not see or hear anything of the alleged spirit of Mary Hulse, though I will candidly admit that I was not looking for her—my interest in the diaphanous maiden having been transferred by that time to one of a much more objective nature!

## II. *The Most Haunted House in England*

On Tuesday, June 11, 1929, I was lunching with a friend, when his telephone bell rang. The call was for me, from the editor of a great London daily. He had been trying to find me all the morning. He told me an extraordinary story. It appeared that one of his representatives had sent in a report of a most unusual *Poltergeist* case that was disturbing the inmates of a country house somewhere in the Home Counties. He sought my co-operation in unravelling the mystery. His man had been at the house for two days and was impressed by what he had seen and heard. Would I take up the case? I eagerly accepted his invitation.

That same afternoon I telegraphed to the tenant saying I would be with him the next day. His reply was: 'Thank God—come quickly. Will expect you to lunch.' The next morning found my secretary and me speeding through the countryside full of hope as to what we were going to see. As we took turns at the wheel, we discussed what the trouble might be. My experience told me to look for a mischievous adolescent, rats, practical jokers—or the village idiot. I have wasted very many weeks in acquiring this knowledge. But, I argued, a London reporter is not easily impressed; usually he is hard-headed, sceptical, and prone to scoff at such things as 'ghosts'. If the representative of the *Daily* — was convinced of something abnormal, obviously the affair was worth inquiring into. We had been so busily discussing the case that, before we realised it, we discovered we were on the outskirts of W—, a market town. With considerable difficulty, we found our way to K— Manor, which is situated in a tiny hamlet, seven miles off

the main road, and near nowhere in particular. We found that the large entrance gates had been opened for us and, as I swung my car up the drive, we could see our host, Mr. H. Robinson,<sup>1</sup> and his wife waiting to welcome us. We jumped out and crossed the threshold of what I am certain is the most haunted house in England; a house in which I have seen and heard the most convincing *Poltergeist* phenomena; and a house which, if it were in the market, I would purchase in order to study *in situ* manifestations of an absolutely abnormal nature. Not only is K— Manor the perfect conception of a haunted house (as regards both situation and variety of phenomena), but its psychic history goes back many years and is fully documented.

At lunch we heard the complete history of the house and its traditions, together with a detailed account of those manifestations which had brought us to such an out-of-the-way spot. The account which follows is from the verbatim notes which my secretary made during lunch.

K— Manor is a large house with nine acres of ground, through which runs a little stream that empties itself in a pond. The grounds are well wooded, and one path, known as the 'Nun's Walk', leads to the little church and churchyard. Contiguous to the walk on one side is a lawn. The house is not an old one, having been built about 1863. It was erected on the site of a twelfth-century monastery, the crypt of which is still preserved. For many years the property has belonged to the Percival family. The mansion was built by Mr. Thomas Percival, who resided there. He died there in 1897. His son, Mr. Walter Percival, then became the occupier. He succumbed to a painful and lingering illness in 1927. He died in the 'Blue Room'. A succession of owners occupied the mansion, but it was alleged that none would stop more than a few months, owing to the disturbances. In the spring of 1929 Mr. H. Robinson rented the house, and spent £200 on doing the place up;

<sup>1</sup>For obvious reasons, some of the names in this report are fictitious.

his occupation was the signal for a display of supernormal happenings which, eventually, drove him out. But I am anticipating.

Now for the traditions, because K—— Manor has several. At the period when the monastery was in its heyday, a coachman belonging to the establishment fell in love with a nun attached to a convent nearby. Their clandestine meetings culminated in an attempted elopement in a black coach drawn by two bay horses, driven by a lay brother. The trio were missed, overtaken, and brought back. The three were tried by their respective superiors. The maiden was walled up alive and the coachmen beheaded. So much for the principal legend—which has several variants. A more modern story tells how the apparition of Mr. Walter Percival is frequently seen, dressed in the old grey bed-jacket in which he died.

It is not clear whether the traditions have been built up on what a number of people undoubtedly think they have seen, or whether the 'appearances' are really the apparitions of the unfortunate mediæval lovers and the late owner. But there is no doubt whatever that many people claim to have seen a coach and pair careering through the grounds of K—— Manor, and, much more frequently, the figure of a nun slowly walking past the lawn towards the churchyard; that is how the 'Nun's Walk' got its name. But the nun and her male friends play only a very small part in the amazing story of K——.

By the time we had finished our coffee, I had heard the history of K—— and its ghostly inhabitants. But what interested me most was Mr. Robinson's story of his own experiences. Of course he heard all about the K—— legend before he took the place, but did not believe a word of it; he regarded as fantastic the stories that previous owners had departed on account of a 'ghost'. His incredulity rapidly gave place to something akin to fear.

The first 'incident' was the ringing of the front-door bell—a

big, sonorous, clanging bell that reverberated all over the house. It was soon after the Robinsons moved in and they were just retiring to rest. It was a terrible night. There was a storm raging and it would be difficult to imagine a worse evening for anyone to be abroad. Mr. Robinson looked at his wife in wonderment. Thinking it was a neighbour in dire trouble, he hurried to the door and withdrew the bolts. The bell stopped ringing. With the lamp in one hand, he peered into the darkness: there was no one there. Sheltering the lamp from the gusts of wind and rain that threatened to extinguish it, he walked a few paces down the drive in search of his visitor. Nothing was to be seen. He went into the roadway, but not a soul was visible. He returned to the house and went to bed. Twenty-five minutes later (at about 11.45) the bell rang out again: not an ordinary ring, but a clangorous solo which lasted until he could get a dressing-gown on and reach the door. No one was there. The rain had then ceased, and thinking the intruder was a small boy playing a joke, he explored a considerable part of the garden and roadway: he found no one. There was no further disturbance that night, but the nocturnal clangour of the door bell rang in an orgy of ringing<sup>1</sup> which persists to this day.

The bells were the start of the trouble. Only a part of the house was furnished, but bell-ropes in empty rooms were pulled as frequently as those in the apartments in use. And then the door-keys commenced to fall out of the locks. Every key would be in its place overnight; in the morning, many of them would be found on the floor. Eventually, *every one disappeared*.

With the key phenomena came the sounds of slipped foot-falls, in all parts of the house, by day and by night. Especially when they were undressing for bed, the Robinsons would hear soft steps in the passage outside their room. More than once Mr.

<sup>1</sup>For the classic case of supernormal bell-ringing, see *Bealings Bells: an Account of the Mysterious Ringing of Bells at Great Bealings, Suffolk, in 1834*, by Edward Moor, Woodbridge, 1841.

Robinson waited in the dark with a hockey stick and made lunges at 'something' that passed him. He never struck anything. Then stones were thrown: small round pebbles (origin unknown) were hurtled through the air, or came rolling down the stairs. Things became so bad that the villagers were frightened. A reporter arrived on the scene—and that is how I came to be connected with the case.

The night previous to my arrival, a new phenomenon was witnessed. It was reported by several people that a light had been seen at the window of one of the empty and disused rooms. It did not remain stationary, but appeared to travel in an elliptical path which was always visible from the garden. The reporter, who had by then established himself in the village, saw the light plainly and suggested to Mr. Robinson that the latter should go to the room with another light and explore. This was done and, for the space of about a minute, the watchers from the garden saw *two* lights side by side, one (our host's) being waved about, the other quite stationary. But Mr. Robinson neither saw nor heard anything in the room.

That was the latest story that was current when I arrived at the Manor on June 12. Having finished lunch, I asked to see the staff of the house. It consisted of a young village girl (who slept at home) and a daily gardener. Of course the girl knew all about the traditions of the place and solemnly assured me that she had seen 'an old-fashioned coach' on the lawn, 'drawn by two horses'. She said she had also seen the 'nun' leaning over a gate near the house. I then learnt that when the Robinsons moved in they brought with them from London a young maid who stayed for exactly forty-eight hours. Questioned about her sudden departure, she declared that near some trees in the garden she had seen a 'nun who had frightened her'. She had *not* been told about the tradition, but nothing would induce her to stop. I interviewed the old gardener, who informed me he had never seen the apparitions but had that very week dug up a skull

(supposed to be a relic of the Great Plague) when removing some turf, and re-buried it in the churchyard.

I spent the remainder of the afternoon and early evening exploring every inch of the house, gardens, cellar, crypt, out-houses and stables (over which were some disused rooms). My secretary and I, in our minute examination of every bell wire, which we traced from the pull to the bell itself (they were the old-fashioned variety, on springs), climbed under the eaves and wormed our way between the top rafters and the tiles. We found a plaque on which the original bell-hangers had written their names, ages, and date, but discovered nothing else. Every wire seemed quite ordinary. We could find nothing suspicious in the house or grounds, so, after a meal, we settled down to wait for dusk.

It is at dusk that the 'nun' is supposed to be most active, so the Pressman and I decided to spend the evening in the garden. My secretary was to report what took place in the house, where she was on guard. We arranged that I should keep my eyes glued on the back windows of the building in wait for the 'light', while the reporter watched the 'Nun's Walk'. As it was getting chilly, we stood in the doorway of a large summer-house. We had been there nearly an hour when the reporter suddenly gripped my arm and whispered: 'There she is!' I looked towards the 'Nun's Walk' and sure enough there appeared to be a shadowy figure gliding down the path under the trees. As he spoke, the newspaper man dashed across the lawn. When he returned, he informed me that the figure became more distinct as he approached it, but vanished as he reached the spot. He told me that it just 'melted away'. I did not see this disappearance, as the reporter was between the figure and me. Concluding that the 'nun' would not be seen again that night, we decided to enter the house. As we passed under the porch, there was a terrific crash and a pane of glass from the roof hurtled to the ground.

The glass missed us by a few feet. It *may* have been coincidence that a pane of glass fell (for no ascertainable reason) just as we entered the porch, but it was very disconcerting. But that was not the worst. We entered the house and searched the place from roof to cellar. Just as we were coming downstairs after the investigation, a red glass candlestick, from the 'Blue Room', was flung down the staircase well and struck an iron stove in the hall. I was splashed with splinters. Immediately after, a mothball came tumbling down the well. The only persons in the house were *downstairs*. (The maid had gone home.)

I then decided to seal every door and window in the house. I fetched from my car the fitted case<sup>1</sup> which I carry on these occasions, and inserted screw-eyes in doors, posts, and window frames. Tapes were threaded through the eyes, knotted, and the knots sealed with post-office leaden seals. Then we adjourned to the 'Blue Room' to see what would happen. It was suggested by Mr. Robinson that we should hold a *séance* in this room, where Mr. Walter Percival had died. I was rather averse to the proposal, as we were not there to encourage the alleged 'spirits', but rather to disperse them. However, I gave way, but insisted upon the *séance* being held by the light of the powerful duplex paraffin lamp which we had carried upstairs. We seated ourselves on the bed and on the two chairs which the room contained, and I made a short speech, addressing my remarks to the four walls of the room. I protested that the manifestations were

<sup>1</sup>The reader may be interested to know what a ghost-hunter's kit consists of. My bag contained: pair of soft felt overshoes, steel measuring tape; screw-eyes, lead seals and sealing tool; white tape; tool-pad and nails; hank of flex, small electric bells, dry batteries and switches (for secret electrical contacts); camera, films and flash-bulbs; note-book, red, blue and black pencils; sketching block and case of drawing instruments; bandages, iodine and surgical adhesive tape; ball of string, stick of chalk, matches, electric torch and candle; flask of brandy; bowl of mercury to detect tremors in room or passage; cinematograph camera with electrical release. For a long stay in house with supply of electricity, I would take with me infra-red filters, lamps, and *ciné* films sensitive to infra-red rays, so that I could photograph objects in almost complete darkness.

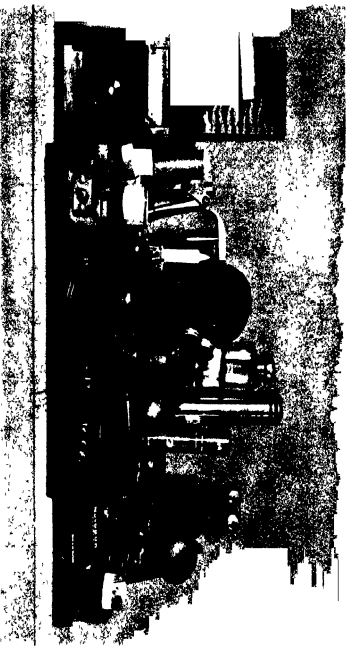


undermining the health of our host and his wife, and implored the disturbing entities, whether evil or benevolent, to depart. I then asked: 'Is Mr. Walter Percival present?' To our amazement, we were answered by a decided rap which appeared to come from the back of a large mirror which stood on the dressing table. It was then about one o'clock in the morning.

For three hours we questioned whatever it was that was rapping out answers. Once for 'yes', twice for 'no' and three times for 'doubtful' was the code which we suggested and which, apparently, the entity understood perfectly. We asked innumerable questions, which were prompted by a member of the Percival family, who was present. 'Walter Percival' discussed his will, his marriage and his relatives; and the answers we received—*via* the mirror—were always intelligent and relevant. We were informed that quite a number of 'family secrets' had been revealed.

Just before we closed this novel and extraordinary *séance*, a cake of soap on the washstand was lifted and thrown heavily on to a china jug which was standing on the floor with such force that the soap was deeply marked. All of us were on the other side of the room when this happened. We dispersed soon after, and I snatched a few hours' sleep on the bed in the 'Blue Room'. I was not disturbed: haunted and hauntings were at peace.

Next morning I went into the town of W—— and interviewed the owners of K—— Manor. They were three sisters, two of whom I saw. They assured me that in 1900, during a garden party, on a sunny afternoon, the three sisters and a maid saw a nun, dressed completely in black, and with bowed head, slowly walking down the path. One of them said, 'I'll speak to her!' and ran across the lawn. As she approached, the figure turned its head and vanished. This story was confirmed by the other sister. The Misses Percival also informed me that their brother, Mr. Walter Percival, frequently saw the coach and



The author's 'ghost-hunting' kit, consisting of reflex and cinematograph cameras, tools for scaling doors and windows, apparatus for secret electrical controls, steel tape, drawing instruments, torch, bottle of mercury, powdered graphite for developing finger-prints, etc.



nun. This was confirmed by a friend of the late owner who wrote to the *Daily* — and stated that on several occasions Mr. Percival had admitted to him that he had seen both nun and coach; and that, when dead, he would, if possible, manifest in the same way. Did he partly fulfil this promise early that same morning when we were assembled in the 'Blue Room'?

I received other evidence as to the haunting of K—— Manor. While I was in W—— I called on a man who was once groom-gardener at the house and who had lived in the rooms over the stables. Every night for eight months he and his wife, when in bed, heard steps in the living-room adjoining. The noises were as if a huge dog had jumped from some considerable height and had then started running round the room. One night there was heard a terrific crash as if the sideboard had toppled over, smashing the ornaments in its fall. The groom jumped out of bed, lit a candle, and went to explore. Not a thing was displaced—and the 'dog' was heard no more. During my investigation I received a letter from another old servant who, forty-three years previously, was an under-nursemaid at the Manor. She told me that it was common talk that the place was haunted. When she had been there a fortnight, she was awakened in the dead of night by someone moving outside her bedroom door. It sounded as if a person were shuffling about in slippers. The experience so unnerved her that her father removed her from the place. There is much good evidence for the haunting of K—— Manor.

During my first visit to K—— I stopped three nights, and disturbances were witnessed each evening. My secretary stayed over the week-end and the phenomena continued. A week or so later, Mr. Robinson and his wife moved to an adjoining village: they simply could not stand the strain any longer. They removed their furniture and locked the place up. On July 22, 1929, Mr. Robinson wrote me: 'Visiting the house last Sunday we discovered that the windows had been unlocked from

within, and one thrown up!' I visited the place several times when it was empty and though the manifestations were not nearly so violent, we still witnessed phenomena. I could fill many pages with what I have seen and heard at K——. But, short of living in the house, I found I could do little more there. Mr. Robinson took another abode and, despairing of finding a new tenant, the owners shut the place up.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two years elapsed before I heard any more of K——. One day the Misses Percival called upon me and said that the Manor was again occupied. The new tenant's name was Mr. B. Morrison. The disturbances, in a much more violent form, had broken out again within a week of his moving in. Mr. Morrison had kept a diary of the phenomena. Would I like to investigate again? I said I would and immediately got in touch with the new tenant, who kindly sent me his diary for perusal. It was an amazing document.

Between February and July 1931 literally hundreds of phenomena were witnessed—thirty-one typescript pages of them! Stones, books and bricks were thrown; bells were rung night and day; 'Walter Percival' was seen many times; perfumes scented the rooms; things (including a gold bracelet) disappeared, but many objects (including a wedding ring), never seen before, put in an appearance; sounds of footsteps were heard; both husband and wife were injured—the latter seriously, four times; once, Mr. Morrison was just enjoying his first sleep when he was awakened by a hard crack on the head with his own hair brush; water from the ewer was slowly poured over the sleeping tenant and his wife, and bedroom utensils marched round the room; bits of paper and the walls were scribbled on; pepper was thrown in their eyes; the wife was half smothered by a mattress, etc. All these incidents are detailed in Mr. Morrison's diary. I decided to visit the place again.

It was early in October 1931 that I paid my last visit to K—. I was accompanied by Mrs. Henry Richards and Mrs. A. Peel Goldney (two members of the council of the National Laboratory of Psychological Research). We spent two nights investigating, and had an amazing story to tell when we returned. We saw red wine turn into ink, and white wine take on the flavour of *eau de Cologne*; an empty wine bottle was hurled at me from above-stairs, missing me by a few inches; bells rang for no apparent reason; Mrs. Richards' chauffeur saw a black hand creep over the door of the kitchen, where he was smoking his pipe; we witnessed a locked door 'miraculously' unlocked by means of a holy relic; we took part in a service of exorcism; we chanted a reliquary prayer; we helped to carry a lady up to bed. . . . We saw even stranger things; so strange, in fact, that—for the moment—my lips are sealed concerning them. But we came to the conclusion that the supernormal played no part in the 'wonders' we had witnessed.

### III. Some Adventures in Haunted Houses

It is not generally realised that one can libel a house as surely as one can libel a person. If I were to assert in these *Confessions* that a certain house was haunted, damages could be claimed. But only if I *originated* the libel. A few years ago I was consulted by a daily newspaper which had published a paragraph that a certain country house was the centre of *Poltergeist* disturbances. The owner (not the tenant, who rather enjoyed a bit of ghost-hunting) happened to see the notice and promptly issued a writ for alleged libel. The editor appealed to me to help him. Had I any record that the house was supposed to be haunted? I searched our files and archives, but could find no trace of the place, of which I had never heard. If I could have produced two lines of printed matter referring to the house as being 'haunted', or a person who could have proved that it was 'common knowledge' the place was possessed by spirits, I could have saved the *Daily* —. But the newspaper had *originated* the story, and the proprietors had to pay. The case was settled out of court for £800.

I have made this rather interesting digression in order to emphasise how difficult it is for a 'ghost-hunter' fully to report and publish all the facts about the houses he investigates. He has to be careful with his names of persons and places. This is a pity, as I believe in publishing the fullest details of a case in which I have been concerned, in order to authenticate it. I have acted on this principle throughout these *Confessions*, with one or two exceptions. But in the account of my adventures which form the subject of this chapter, I have been compelled to withhold certain information by means of which some of the places could be identified.

Ghost-hunting (even professional ghost-hunting) is of ancient origin and was fully discussed as long ago as 1572 when Lavater's famous book, *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght*,<sup>1</sup> was published. In many respects, the book might have been written yesterday, instead of in the sixteenth century, and it is a fact that Shakespeare drew largely from the work when he wrote *Hamlet*. The first chapter 'Concerning certaine wordes which are often used in this Treatise of Spirits' deals with the terms *spectrum*, defined as 'a substance without a body, which beeing hearde or scene, maketh men afrayde', visions, and apparitions. The author then warns his readers to be critical of the evidence for spirits: 'Melancholike persons, and madde men, imagin many things which in verie deede are not. Men which are dull of seing and hearing imagine many things which in very deed are not so.' Lavater's words should be emblazoned in neon lights over the portals of every *séance*-room. Lavater then proceeds to describe various fraudulent phenomena and again warns us 'That many naturall things are taken to be ghosts, as for example, when they heare the crying of rats, cats, weasles, martins, or any other beast, or when they heare a horse beate his feete on the plankes in the stable at midnight, by and by they sweate for feare, supposing some buggs to walke in the dead of the night. . . . If a worme whiche fretteth wood, or that breadeth in trees chaunce to gnawe a wall or waynescot, or other tymber, many will judge they heare one softly knocking uppon an andvill with a sledge.' Lavater knew his 'sitters', who were much the same three hundred and sixty years ago as they are to-day. The remainder of the work deals with apparently genuine phenomena, and the author discusses

<sup>1</sup>*Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght, and of strange noyses, crackes, and sundry forewarnynges, which commonly happen before the death of menne, great slaughters, & alterations of Kyngdomes. One Booke, Written by Lewes Lavaterus of Figurine [Zurich], London, 1572. This is a translation of De Spectris, by Ludwig Lavater, Geneva, 1570. The English edition is excessively rare; the original edition less so.*



survival from every angle. Considering its antiquity, Lavater's is an amazing work.

Lavater was wise in warning his readers against mistaking normal noises for supernormal ones, and two incidents which came within my own experience are worth recording. The first happened on New Year's Eve, when I was staying at a house in a Shropshire village. I had retired to rest soon after ten o'clock, leaving my bedroom window open according to my usual custom. At about 11.45 I was awakened by the church bells ringing in the New Year. The little church was only about two hundred yards from the house in which I was staying. As I lay awake listening to them, I fancied that with their clangour I could hear sweet music coming from the dining-room, which was immediately below my bedchamber. As I listened, I could distinctly hear faint chords as from a harp or zither. Then I remembered that in the apartment below me was a piano, and it occurred to me that someone might be twanging the strings, producing a sort of *pizzicato* effect. It sounded most weird, and one could easily have imagined a ghostly harpist in the room below. I decided to investigate and made my way to the lower storey. I quickly solved the mystery. Actually, the explanation was quite simple. I discovered that certain notes from the piano recurred always during a particular peal from the bells, and thus gave me the clue to the 'ghostly music'. The wires of the piano were vibrating in sympathy with the noisy bells. This 'sympathetic vibration' is well known to physicists. In the same way Caruso, the famous tenor, could emit a note that would crack a wine glass in the immediate vicinity.

The second incident I referred to occurred on January 21, 1926, when the rooms of the National Laboratory of Psychological Research were thrown open for public inspection. The building had been newly furnished and certain alterations had been carried out. After the crowds had departed, I decided to stay and work all night at some particular experiment on which I was

engaged. The laboratory suite was on the top floor of the building and no one but the caretakers, who occupied the basement flat, five floors below, were in the house. Yet throughout the night I could hear noises such as raps and footsteps coming from the rooms below ours. At first I thought they were caused by one of the caretakers, but then I argued that these people would not be moving about so late at night. I decided to investigate.

I did so, and traced one noise to its source. In the lecture hall, three floors below the laboratory, there had been installed during the day a low stage or platform made of new wood. The rooms had been very much heated in the evening, and in the early hours of the morning were rapidly becoming cooler. As the room cooled, the woodwork contracted, and the straining of the joints emitted noises which were magnified into what sounded like hammer blows. I transferred a transmitting thermograph from the laboratory to the lecture hall, and noticed that as the temperature of the apartment fell, so the sounds increased. The maximum drop in the thermograph coincided with the cessation of the noises, the new wood being no longer affected by the fall in the temperature.

Having now recorded how I ran to earth certain 'ghostly' noises, I will relate some adventures in haunted houses in which, I am convinced, genuine phenomena occurred. In particular, the derelict mansion in Somersetshire much impressed me. This house had stood empty, on and off, for over thirty years. No agent could let it and even caretakers were afraid of remaining in the place. The villagers declared that 'fiendish faces', apparently suspended in the air, peered through the windows of the top floor. Footsteps were heard in locked rooms which had not been opened for twenty years, and the noise of boxes being dragged about the room scared every caretaker who attempted to live in the place. This latter noise was a very curious one. People who declared they had heard the manifesta-

tions said it was as if a heavy box or chest had been dropped from a height, and then slowly dragged across the room.

Other manifestations included an epidemic of broken windows (caused probably by small boys); and a curious sound resembling the 'whirr' of the wings of a giant bird of prey which was heard in various parts of the building. I ascribed most of these alleged phenomena to fear on the part of the few caretakers who had resided in the place, or to local gossip in the village. But the 'whurring wings' phenomenon was real enough, as I discovered when I investigated the case.

I spent two whole days, and one night, in the Somersetshire mansion. Previous to my visit, I interviewed several people in the village (including two persons who had acted as caretakers at different times) and received first-hand accounts of the haunting. The stories more or less tallied and were similar to those contained in the report of the place which I had received in London. I took with me to the house one of the men who had acted as custodian there about ten years previously, and who knew every nook and corner of the place.

With my guide, I explored the house from top to bottom. Everything seemed normal, except that the place was in a shocking state of disrepair. What were once fine Italian moulded ceilings littered the floor, and in many of the rooms the wall-papers were in ribbons. Damp was slowly consuming the place.

It was in February when I visited the mansion, and by six o'clock it was quite dark. We had had some provisions sent in from the village inn, and after a sort of high tea we decided to explore the place again. This time I was rewarded for the trouble and expense I had been put to in investigating the affair, and I added to my case-book the details of one of the strangest phenomena I have ever experienced.

It was on the fourth (top) floor where we heard the curious noise which had been likened to that of a flying bird. But to me it sounded like something between the humming whirr a

circular saw makes when in motion and a strong wind rushing through a gully or narrow passage. The place had been used as a box room and there was neither chimney nor ventilator in the room. There was a fairly large window which, after some trouble, my companion succeeded in opening. The 'whirring' stopped instantly. We closed the window and again the phenomenon was heard. Then we closed both door and window, but the 'whirring' sound persisted. Whether the door was open or closed made no difference to the phenomenon. But immediately we opened the window, the 'rushing wind' effect was not apparent.

The sceptic will naturally conclude that the noise we heard was caused by the wind outside forcing its way through cracks and crevices into the box room, thus deceiving us into believing that we were witnessing something abnormal. Well, the sceptic will be wrong, because it happened to be a cold, frosty night with not even a slight breeze. It was also very clear and starry, and from the open window of the box room we could see the lights of Minehead many miles away.

We made ourselves comfortable on some old rugs we had brought with us, and spent the night on the floor, trying to keep warm and hoping that something would happen. Actually, nothing further did happen. Twice during the night I went to the box room, and the whirring could be heard on each occasion. I spent the whole of the next day—which was wet—in the house, and heard nothing until it was nearly dark, when the wind phenomenon recommenced. I returned to London. I think it was this particular manifestation which gave the house its sinister reputation.

A year or so after my visit I was motoring in Somerset and made a detour in order to have another look at the mansion. To my surprise, the builders were hard at work reconstructing the premises. It is now a 'boarding establishment for young ladies' and is occasionally advertised in the scholastic press. I

smile when I read the advertisements, and wonder if the 'bird' still holds its own against seventy healthy schoolgirls. I am afraid not.

Whether the rebuilding of a 'haunted' house is an infallible method of dislodging a disturbing entity is open to doubt, as I have records of sites upon which have been erected a succession of buildings, all of which have acquired the same reputation of possessing *Poltergeists*. But it is probable that the traditions were merely handed down from generation to generation. For example, I once spent a night in a house near Hayward's Heath concerning which a story was current that Cromwell's soldiers had once been quartered in a previous building on the same site, and that, night after night, the sounds of revelry and strange oaths were still to be heard. I visited the house on two occasions, but could not make sure that I heard anything abnormal. It is curious that the great majority of alleged haunted houses owe their reputations to the fact that the manifestations are aural and not visual. At this same Sussex 'haunt' it was alleged that the tramp of soldiers could be heard at certain times of the year. The villagers are convinced that the dead Cromwellian soldiers have stamped their personality upon the place.

I know of another cottage built on a part of the site of the ancient Roman city of Uriconium, or Viroconium, the capital of Britannia Secunda (near Wroxeter, Shropshire), which, in its day, was one of the most important Roman settlements in England.<sup>1</sup> Pompeii, at the height of its power and prosperity, was inferior in size and importance to Uriconium in its prime. It was burned by the West Saxons in A.D. 584. Yet there is little to be seen there to-day except the remains of the south wall of the basilica, which refuses to disintegrate, and the ruins of the public baths, which are of purely archæological interest. Antiquarian subjects have always interested me, and, hearing

<sup>1</sup>See *Uriconium: a Historical Account of the Ancient Roman City*, by Thomas Wright, London, 1872.

that there was a haunted cottage on the old Roman site, I visited the place and made some inquiries. I happened to be spending a vacation in Shropshire, so it was convenient for me to combine a little ghost-hunting with my holiday.

From the description of the place which I received, I had no difficulty in finding the cottage, which was occupied by a young cattle dealer, his wife and a little girl aged three years. They did not know I was coming and I refrained from writing in case the village turned out *en masse* to welcome me. I live in a village myself, and news travels quickly in such places.

The dealer was surprised to see me, and astonished when I told him the reason for my visit at such a late hour. It was nearly ten o'clock on a June evening. Fortunately, Summer Time—that bane of ghost-hunters—had not been invented. I was invited into the kitchen-parlour, and for more than an hour I plied my host and his wife with questions concerning the alleged disturbances. Yes, they had often seen a young girl, clad in a Roman *stola* (this is not the word he used) of white linen, slowly climbing the few stairs which led to the upper rooms of the cottage. The apparition was never seen at any other spot except on the stairs—always climbing and never descending. She invariably vanished as she reached the small landing at the head of the stairs. Both husband and wife had met 'the girl', but the man had seen nothing else. But his wife—it was alleged—had frequently encountered various figures in *togas*, crowding outside the cottage door, and always when it was dusk or nearly dusk. The woman declared that on many occasions, as she opened the door, she had seen a number of men dressed as Roman civilians (whom she described in detail) standing outside the door as if about to crowd into the cottage. But they always vanished before the door could be fully opened. Her husband declared that his wife (a Scotswoman) possessed 'second sight'—a faculty which was shared by other members of her family.

Questioned as to whether they ever *heard* anything, both the dealer and his wife said that raps, footsteps, and 'a rumbling sound as of heavy wheels rolling over cobbles' had been heard infrequently. I was about to take my departure when the dealer asked me if I cared to spend the night in the house. Although I had intended staying at the Heber Arms (I think that was the name of the inn), at Wroxeter, I accepted my host's invitation, and the only spare bedroom was placed at my disposal. After a substantial meal of fat pickled pork, red cabbage and home-brewed beer, we drank the time-honoured toast to 'all friends round the Wrekin' in some excellent sloe gin, and I retired to my room. I did not undress, but sat reading by the light of two candles and a stable lantern. The only disturbance that night was caused by a bat which flew through my open window and knocked a candle over. There were the usual sounds that one hears at night: the call of birds, owls hooting, timbers creaking, etc., but I could not persuade myself that the noises were abnormal. Curiously enough, I did not feel sleepy, which was very unusual. Soon after five o'clock I heard the dealer moving about the house, so I had a wash and joined him. He was not surprised that I had neither seen nor heard anything, and suggested my spending another night in the cottage. 'If you sleep on the stairs', he said, 'you will be bound to see the girl sooner or later.' But I was due back in Shrewsbury and could spare no more time on the Roman ghosts. After breakfast—which, like the supper, consisted of bacon and beer—I took my departure. My visit was not quite without result, as I was put in the way of acquiring a Roman *amphora*, in perfect condition, which had been found somewhere in the neighbourhood.

Speaking of cottages reminds me that in 1925 I investigated one in Surrey, and in many ways the case is unique. The cottage itself was not haunted, but the tenants continually heard footsteps on the gravel path which encircled the building. The manifestations commenced as soon as the place was occupied.

During the first week, the woman twice went to the door, thinking it was the postman, but no one was there. The path had been newly gravelled and the lightest step upon it could be heard within the house, which was off the main road and quite isolated. The only occupants of the cottage were the husband and wife, the former being out all day.

A peculiarity of this particular 'haunt' was that the footsteps were heard punctually at 8.30 on most mornings, but especially towards the end of the week, though never on a Sunday. A watch was kept in the garden from certain sheds that commanded a view of the pathway, but the perambulating ghost was never seen, and never heard except from within the cottage.

Unaware that the entity never 'walked' on a Sunday, I first visited the cottage on a Saturday night, hoping to hear the footsteps on the following morning. Learning that this was highly improbable, on the Sunday I busied myself with making four wide and shallow trenches across the path. I filled these trenches with a mixture of flour and silver sand which I made perfectly smooth with a newspaper in the hope that the ghost's footprints would be impressed upon it. Next morning I was up early, had breakfast, and waited for the intangible visitor. On the stroke of half-past eight, the steps could be heard approaching. They appeared to come from the back of the cottage. There was nothing peculiar about the steps—it was just as if a man, with rather a firm tread, were approaching the house. I ran into the small hall and peered through the letter-box. Nothing was seen to pass, but I could hear the footsteps as they came nearer and nearer, and gradually died away. I rushed out of the cottage, but could find no one. I searched the buildings without success. The man belonging to the house had left for work soon after seven o'clock and no servant was employed. There were no animals in the immediate neighbourhood. The nearest habitation was nearly half a mile away. I was convinced that no person was playing a trick on me. I examined my trenches, but



they were quite unmarked. I was disappointed that no impressions of footprints were visible—even the mark of a cloven hoof would have been acceptable! I visited the cottage three times in all, but heard the footsteps on the first occasion only. The cottage became vacant a few months after my last visit; the place was taken by two maiden ladies who turned the house into a tea garden. It did not pay, but whether the 'footsteps' or the lack of custom was responsible for their vacating the cottage, I never ascertained. But the place is still empty.

One does not usually associate a London playhouse with the occult; and the dressing-room of a popular musical comedy actress is the last place one would expect to be haunted. But it was to the Adelphi Theatre that I was called a few years ago in order to investigate an alleged 'ghost'.

It was at the stage door of the Adelphi Theatre in 1897 that William Terriss was murdered, and it was into the dressing-room afterwards occupied by the actress in question that his body was carried. I interviewed a number of dressers, firemen and stage-hands, and they all claimed to have heard the strange noises. The actress informed me that time after time, when resting on a certain couch, between the afternoon and evening performances, she had been awakened by loud noises in her room, and thumps coming from under the couch. Friends who had been with her on these occasions verified her statements. Once she awoke with a scream and afterwards said her arm felt as if it had been gripped by a hand. Later—I was informed—four weals appeared on her arm, exactly as if four fingers had tightly gripped the flesh. This story was confirmed by a friend of the actress. I was asked if I knew a medium who could get into touch with whatever was causing the disturbance. I said I did not, but I happened to have arranged for that evening a sitting with Stella C.,<sup>1</sup> the famous physical medium. I said I would bring her to the theatre.

<sup>1</sup>See *Stella C.: an Account of Some Original Experiments in Psychical Research*, by Harry Price, London, 1925.

I held a *séance* in the dressing-room with Stella which lasted until 2.30 in the morning; but the conditions—an atmosphere of Pressmen and tobacco smoke—were not very favourable for the experiments. Nevertheless, we did get a few phenomena, though these were undoubtedly due to Stella's presence. I asked the actress to sit on the couch, and later she declared that she felt the familiar thumps beneath it. One really curious incident happened: during the *séance* a sudden crash came from the direction of the mirror over the mantelpiece. Everyone heard it, and we speculated as to what it could be; it sounded as if something had fallen heavily, although the crash seemed to come from *behind* the glass. The mirror itself was untouched. This was certainly strange, but the late hour prevented my making further experiments. I heard nothing more about the 'haunted dressing-room', which, if it did nothing else, provided considerable publicity for a number of people.

My adventures in haunted houses have not been confined to British soil. In 1928 I heard from the late Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing that a most extraordinary *Poltergeist* case in a house at Munich was occupying his attention. He invited me to co-operate in its elucidation. The haunting was unique inasmuch that, in addition to the usual *Poltergeist* phenomena, there were other strange occurrences outside the house, which appeared to have a bearing on the case.

I decided to accept Baron von Schrenck's invitation, but I was delayed in various ways and, just as I was about to start for Munich, I heard that the manifestations had suddenly ceased. However, the case is so interesting that I make no apology for including it in this chapter.

In Munich, as in most Continental cities, the majority of the residents live in flats. It was in one of these, in an *appartement* of four rooms on the second floor of a building in the Augustenstrasse, that the curious happenings took place.

The flat had for many years been occupied by an elderly lady,

the widow of a doctor. She had let one room to a chemical student and, eight days before the commencement of the extraordinary events I am about to relate, she had dismissed her servant on account of 'malevolence', and had engaged as a new maid a girl of fourteen years.

The lady went out for a little while one afternoon and only the maid and the lodger were left at home. Suddenly the front-door bell rang. The girl opened the door and saw a tall man with a dark cloak and blue hat standing before her. For some reason that she could never explain, she no sooner set eyes on him than she felt afraid. The girl answered the door perhaps twenty times a day, but this man was 'different' from all other visitors. It seemed to her there was something uncanny about him. She was a little frightened by his dark and old-world clothes and his staring eyes, though he merely asked politely for the servant who had just been dismissed. At this the girl began to tremble, and when she informed the stranger that the person he wanted was no longer in the house, he became abusive. The maid plucked up sufficient courage to close and lock the door in his face, and then reported the incident to the lodger, who at once went to look for the mysterious intruder. He could not be found.

Two hours later, after the widow had returned, strange things began to happen in the flat. At first, the door bell rang violently. The ringing lasted an hour, yet no one was to be seen at the door. There followed a violent 'drumming' on the door, though the drummer remained invisible. This continued for some time, and then the family were thrown into a state of panic, for it seemed as if the disturbing entity had entered the flat. Glasses, plates, vases, tumblers, spoons and various other articles were flung in all directions by an unseen hand. Doors and windows opened by themselves, and the wardrobe mirror was smashed to pieces by some invisible object. A reel of thread was thrown through the letter-box of the door and as suddenly disappeared.

Furniture moved of its own volition. Nothing would ſtay in its place for five consecutive minutes. Overcoats hanging in the hall were mysteriouſly transported to other rooms. The maid would cloſe a drawer one moment, and it would be opened and the contents turned out by unſeen hands the next. The manifeſtations became ſo alarming that finally the police were ſummoned.

During the examination of the rooms and their contents, the manifeſtations went on without interruption. In the widow's bedroom a tumbler of water filled itſelf, flew across the room, and the contents ſplashed on her bed. When ſhe picked up the tumbler and placed it on a table, it flew off and ſmashed itſelf againſt the wall. In the ſtudent's bed were found a bowl filled with water, ſhoes and plates; on the maidservant's bed were found a bottle of water and a ſprig of a fir-tree which belonged to a bunch in the hall. In her trunk was diſcovered the miſſing reel of thread which had ſo mysteriouſly found its way through the letter-box. Behind a curtain were found ſeveral valuable vases which in ſome inexplicable manner had been removed from their uſual poſitions. Whiſt theſe diſcoveries were being made the ſtrange diſplacement of objects continued.

On another occaſion, when the police were actually in the flat, a fire broke out in one of the rooms without any apparent cauſe. A knife was thrown at, and ſtruck one of the policemen, and a glaſs fell on his head. It is ſaid that the mysterious ſtranger was again ſeen at the flat early in the morning on the day after his firſt viſit, but quickly diſappeared on being detected. No explanation of the extraordinary occurrences was forthcoming. The ſpiritualiſts claimed that the ſtranger was a ghoul who was ſeeking ſome object. Whether there was any truth in this, I cannot ſay. A more likely explanation is that the manifeſtations were cauſed by the maidservant. Even the police had to confeſs themſelves baffled, which, to ſay the leaſt of it, is very unuſual

in such affairs. Eventually, as in most *Poltergeist* cases, the manifestations completely subsided.

I remember yet another peculiar 'haunting' I investigated on the Continent. This was in a house at Hall, near Innsbruck, which was alleged to be occupied by a particularly vindictive 'spirit'. Several observers stated that if any person attempted to enter the place after nightfall, a very powerful 'something' flung him out with great force. It appeared that the 'thing' had a particular antipathy even to inanimate objects, for if a hat were thrown into the open doorway, it would return like a boomerang.

Personally, I saw nothing of these wonders, for I managed to enter the house without hindrance, though appearances indicated there was something wrong. Not only did the atmosphere appear especially oppressive, but also, on several occasions, objects moved without apparent physical contact. Once or twice when I was there, rooms were sealed up, yet when they were opened, chairs, carefully placed in a certain order, were found to have moved. I will not weary the reader with further details of these manifestations, since they had much in common with many others that I have described in these *Confessions*. The case possessed all the usual features associated with a *Poltergeist*—even the stories of 'miracles' which never happened!

The 'highest' haunting I have ever known was also due to an alleged *Poltergeist*, which manifested in the Concordia Hütte on the Concordia-Platz, one of the chief mountaineering centres in Switzerland. Huts, as the reader is aware, are erected all over the Alps by the Swiss Alpine Club and are intended to serve as refuges for persons who require shelter, the interiors being fully equipped with food, firing, bedding, and all the necessities for a comfortable night.

One day, in the Concordia Hut on the Great Aletsch Glacier near the Jungfrauoch, nearly 12,000 feet above sea-level, a man

was found dead. He had been to the Lötschen-Lücke Pass, had apparently lost his way, and had staggered into the hut, too exhausted even to light a fire: the paralysing cold of an Alpine night crept upon him and he perished before a rescue party could arrive.

The following summer, a party of tourists also had occasion to seek the shelter of the hut. They had been there but a few hours when they felt that something was the matter with the place, and they were thoroughly scared. I was informed that not a thing in the hut would stay in its place. The tourists lit a lantern, and 'invisible hands' extinguished it; they tried to prepare a meal, and the mischievous *Geist* scattered the utensils; they attempted to sleep, and the unseen and unwelcome tenant of the hut violently disarranged the blankets! The whole party spent a miserable night and, just as dawn was breaking, they decided to quit the place, and descended into Interlaken. I happened to be staying at this beautiful Swiss resort at the time, and when they arrived I was consulted. I had to say that (assuming their story to be true in every particular) the strange manifestations could be accounted for only by the presence of a *Poltergeist* induced, the spiritualists would declare, by the dead mountaineer who had been found in the hut a few months previously.

I will continue my adventures in foreign haunted houses with an account of one I investigated at the beautiful spa of Baden-bei-Wien. I was staying in Vienna at the time, and read in one of the papers that much excitement prevailed in Baden owing to an alleged ghost that was haunting a cheap *pension* not far from the Theresienstrasse. I took an electric tram to Baden, where I arrived about seven o'clock in the evening. I made my way to the house, presented my card, and heard the story of the haunting. It appears that on the morning of the previous day, a young girl staying at the *pension* had committed suicide by throwing herself from one of the upper windows. The body had been removed to the mortuary.

Twenty-four hours later, passers-by declared they saw her staring out of the identical window from which she had leapt to her death. Boarders in the house were convinced that they could hear screams coming from the room she had occupied. I spent some hours in the *pension* and must admit that I, too, thought I heard very faint screams coming from the girl's room. But when I entered the apartment, I could neither see nor hear anything unusual. By the time I had finished my investigation, it was very late and I was fortunate in finding a taxi to take me back to Vienna. Next day I again visited the place, and stood for some hours outside the *pension* in the hope of seeing the 'face at the window'. I was unfortunate, and saw nothing—except the gaping crowds which impeded the traffic. I returned to Vienna. The Baden ghost died a natural death—if I can use such an expression—and I am still wondering whether I really heard those faint screams outside the dead girl's room. Imagination plays a major part in these cases.

I will close this chapter by relating an experience in my most picturesque haunted house. The 'house' happens to be a German castle, the Burg Falkenstein, in the Harz Mountains. On October 1, 1935, Fräulein Gerda Knoche, a law student from Göttingen University, Mr. R. S. Lambert and I decided to explore the Schloss Falkenstein. We were staying at Halberstadt, and an hour's car ride took us to Ballenstedt, in the Eastern Harz, above which is Falkenstein Castle. After a stiff climb through pine woods, we arrived at the castle. It is 1050 feet above sea-level, and is situated on a lofty rock. It dates back to the eleventh century, and is, I think, one of the most beautiful specimens of a mediæval residence I have ever seen. It is completely equipped with contemporary furniture, trophies of the chase, and other antiquities. It is a veritable museum.

At certain times of the year the owner, the Graf von Assebourg, resides in the *Schloss*, which is usually occupied by caretakers only. We were conducted over the castle and shown in-

numerable objects of interest. We saw the room where, between 1198 and 1235, the jurist Eyke von Repkow wrote the *Sachsenspiegel*, the oldest German legal code. We were shown the rooms occupied by Bismarck, and visited the chapel in which Martin Luther used to preach. Leading out of this chapel is a door, with a massive iron lock. We were told that that door has not been opened for five hundred years and no one knows what is in the room (which has no windows) beyond it. If ever the door is opened, disaster will befall the owners, and the house will perish. I must admit that I was sceptical concerning the story. Five hundred years is a long time, and it seemed fantastic that no one has been curious enough, or bold enough, to brave the 'curse' during this period.

But what interested me most was the fact that the *Schloss* contained a 'haunted bed'. It is a high, narrow affair of carved wood, in a large apartment hung with tapestries. Ancient furniture and bedroom utensils are in keeping with the 'White Lady' who is alleged to haunt the chamber. I could obtain no precise information as to who the lady was, except that she is supposed to be an ancestress of the present owner of the *Schloss*. The caretakers have seen her many times, at dusk, always hovering round the bed, as if she were protecting someone or something in it. The bed itself looked quite comfortable. Though antique, the linen sheets appeared modern, if somewhat damp and cold. Mr. Lambert and I asked permission to spend the night with the 'White Lady of Falkenstein', and were informed that this might be possible if we could obtain the consent of the owner of the *Schloss*. We said we would try.

The Herr Graf von Assebourg has a large mansion on the edge of a forest a few miles from Falkenstein, and we were fortunate in finding the family in residence, though the Count himself was hunting deer in the forest. We were introduced to his daughter, who laughed heartily when she heard our strange request. Of course, she had heard of the 'White Lady', but as



she had never slept in the haunted bed, she had not seen her. She confirmed the custodian's story that the 'curse room' had *not* been opened for five hundred years. 'I am not superstitious', she said, 'but I should not like to open the door, and I do not know what the room contains.' She could not give us permission to investigate the 'White Lady', and asked us to telephone the Herr Graf when he returned from the chase. This we did, but were informed that he could not allow the room—or the 'White Lady'—to be disturbed. He pointed out that the custodians of the *Schloss* had no facilities for entertaining visitors; that the bed linen was damp; and that we should be miserable if we attempted to spend a night in the place. We were disappointed, but consoled ourselves with the fact that we had had a thoroughly 'mediæval' day, and had witnessed the strange phenomenon of a German aristocrat and his retainers still hunting the deer in his own forest, just as his ancestors did nine hundred years ago. The *swastika* has wrought many changes, but the Harz remains inviolate.

#### *IV. The Strange Exploits of a London Poltergeist*

London is so infrequently visited by an alleged *Poltergeist* that when one does put in an appearance, so to speak, it naturally causes considerable excitement. This is what happened a few years ago, the disturbances—very real, whether normal or supernormal—lasting nearly two months.

The focus of the manifestations was centred in a small villa in a South London suburb, a bustling working-class district with no attractions, one would have thought, for a *Poltergeist*.

The villa was inhabited by a Mr. Edward Smith,<sup>1</sup> an invalid of eighty-six, who had lived there twenty-five years, and who was removed to the infirmary at the request of the family when the disturbances commenced. With Mr. Smith, senior, lived his son Walter, a tutor aged twenty-seven, and his three sisters: Miss Lucy Smith; Miss Anne Smith; and Mrs. Harold West, a widow, who had a fourteen-year-old son Cyril. The Misses Smith were school teachers.

The house in Bury Road is of a type of which tens of thousands can be found scattered all round the Metropolis. It has two floors and a small garden at front and rear. It is the typical abode of the London artisan. From the garden of the Bury Road house can be seen the back windows of some premises occupied by a medical practitioner who keeps a private asylum or mental home. I was told that men suffering from shell-shock were his principal patients. From the doctor's windows to the back of the 'mystery house', as the Press dubbed it, is about eighty yards. It would be possible for a person standing at the

<sup>1</sup>As this case is so recent, I have disguised the names of the inmates of the house.

windows of the private asylum to propel, by means of a catapult, small objects such as coins, pieces of coal, etc., with sufficient force to break the windows of the houses in Bury Road.

It was just before Christmas 1927 that I first heard of the strange happenings in Bury Road, but I attached no importance to the report, which differed little from many others which I am continually receiving. Later, I received further information from a private source.

On Thursday, January 19, 1928, at 9.30 a.m., I paid my first visit. I found the family at breakfast, and my first impression was distinctly favourable as regards the family and also as to the improbability of the inmates of the house being responsible for the destruction of their own home. For I at once saw that someone or something had caused considerable damage to the Smith *ménage*. Broken windows, smashed furniture, and the *débris* of ornaments were much in evidence. After a few minutes' chat I withdrew and promised to call again.

On returning to my office I found a message from the editor of the *Evening News* asking if I would allow a reporter of that paper to accompany me to the house. I consented, and at three o'clock the same afternoon a car was sent for me, and for the second time that day I found myself in Bury Road—this time with a Press representative.

Miss Anne Smith and Mr. Walter Smith were the only members of the family who were in the house on the afternoon of January 19, and from them we obtained the complete story of the disturbances.

'Except for Cyril', said Mr. Smith, 'we have lived in the house for twenty-five years, happily and peacefully. Then on November 29 lumps of coal, pieces of soda and pennies began to fall on the conservatory—a lean-to building at the back of the house.

'Things became so serious', Mr. Smith continued, 'that I decided to call the police. I had no other idea except that some

person was throwing things over the garden wall. A constable came along, and together we stood in the back garden and kept watch. Pieces of coal and pennies crashed on to the conservatory roof, but we could not trace their flight. One lump of coal hit the constable's helmet. He ran to the garden wall, but there was nobody there. On December 19 our washerwoman said she would not work any longer in the house. She came to me in a state of terror and pointed to a heap of red-hot cinders in the outhouse. There was no fire there. How could they have got there? Again I called a constable, and we decided to watch in the kitchen. Two potatoes were hurled in while we were sitting there. It was on Monday that the climax came—at nine o'clock in the morning—and for an hour we were terror-stricken. There were loud bangings in all parts of the house. My sister ran to tell the magistrate. The window panel in my father's bedroom was smashed, and I decided, as he was in such a state of fear, to remove him from the house.<sup>1</sup> I called in a man from the street, and together we carried him from the room. Just as we were taking him out a heavy chest of drawers crashed to the floor in his bedroom. Previously my sister had seen the hall-stand swaying and had called me. I caught it before it fell, but some strange power seemed to tear it from my hands, and it fell against the stairs, breaking in two parts.'

After we had heard the history of the disturbances from their beginning, the reporter and I made a tour of the house and carefully inspected the damage, which was considerable. Several of the windows were broken, some with small holes in them as if stones had been fired at them by means of a catapult. Some of the panes of glass of the conservatory roof were also shattered, and lying on the roof were pebbles, pennies, lumps of coal, potatoes, pieces of soda, etc., which had been thrown there. A door inside the house had also one of its glass panels broken.

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Smith, senior, died before the disturbances ceased.

In the back bedroom we found the panels of the door shattered; a heavy chest of drawers was splintered as if from a fall; and the remains of several smashed ornaments were scattered about. In the hall we saw a smashed hat-stand in two pieces and we viewed the remains of two broken bedroom doors, a tea tray with one of its sides ripped off, and numbers of pictures which had fallen to the ground. In the small garden were strewn lumps of soda, coal, etc., and Mr. Smith pointed out two windows of neighbouring houses which had received the unwelcome attention of the alleged *Geist*: both had small holes in them as if caused by stones shot from a catapult.

After our tour of inspection we returned to the kitchen, where the four of us—Miss Anne Smith, Mr. Walter Smith, the *Evening News* representative, and myself—stood chatting. We were the sole occupants of the house. The reporter and I were just about to take our departure when some hard object fell with a resounding thwack in the passage at the back of us. The kitchen is connected with the scullery by a short passage. The scullery leads directly to the garden by a door which we had just closed.

Upon the fall of the object we four at once proceeded into the passage and found that a metal ferro-cerium gas-lighter, weighing two ounces, with a wooden handle (over-all length about eight inches), was lying midway between the kitchen and scullery. Undoubtedly, it had been projected from behind us and had, apparently, struck the wall in its flight. We immediately retraced our steps through the scullery and into the garden, but no one was visible. Nothing further occurred that day.

Next morning I was rung up by the editor of the *Evening News*, who told me that the authorities had removed young Smith for observation as to his mental state. I was astounded at this fresh development. I had had an hour's conversation with Walter Smith on the previous day and had found him quite

normal and very intelligent. It appears that the police had formed a theory that Mr. Smith, junior, was responsible for the manifestations and decided to examine him at a local hospital.

I again visited the house on Monday afternoon (January 23) and had a long interview with Mrs. West, the widowed sister. The *Evening News* reporter again accompanied me.

The fact that Mr. Walter Smith was not now in the house made no difference to the alleged phenomena. Mrs. West told us that during the week-end the manifestations had been both varied and violent; besides the usual arrival of pieces of coal, etc., there had been 'great activity amongst the furniture'. Chairs, of their own volition, 'had marched down the hall single file', and three times Mrs. West attempted to lay the table for Saturday's dinner. On each occasion the chairs had piled themselves up on the table, making it impossible for the woman to proceed with the preparation of the meal. At the third time she went out into the road and asked a police officer who was on duty there to enter the house and examine the 'phenomena' himself. He naturally accused Mrs. West of piling up the furniture herself. A London policeman has little imagination!

Three persons appear to have witnessed the alleged spontaneous movement of the furniture, *viz.* Mrs. West, Miss Smith, and Cyril West, the fourteen-year-old boy, who was so frightened—it was stated—that he could hardly be induced to sit on a chair in case it should move. He was afterwards sent to the country to recuperate.

After we had heard the story of what had happened during the week-end we made another examination of the house. It appeared to be in much the same state as when we left it on the previous Friday. We then returned to the kitchen, and the four of us (Mrs. West, Miss Smith, the reporter and myself) stood chatting in the kitchen, when suddenly there was a sound as if a heavy object had fallen behind us, in the kitchen, but near the

passage leading to the scullery, *the door of which was shut*. To me, the noise sounded like the fall of a heavy boot or brush and I at once began to look for such an article; so did the *Evening News* representative. In a minute or so I saw something dark under a chair in the corner and putting my hand on it I found it was a pair of lady's black shoes. Actually I put my hand on a hard object which was in the right shoe and brought it to light. It was a small bronze ornament in the form of a cherub, weighing about four ounces.

The cries of astonishment—real or simulated—with which the ladies greeted my 'find' were renewed when it was discovered that the ornament was missing from the mantelpiece of the front sitting-room where, I was informed, it had reposed (together with its fellow-cherub) for twenty-five years. We were assured that these cherubim had never been removed from the front room. I continued my search of the kitchen, but could discover nothing else which could have fallen.

We searched the house once more but satisfied ourselves that we were the only occupants. The reporter and I arranged to spend the next night in the house. The following day I was informed that the Bury Road house had been shut up, so that I gave up the idea of staying all night. The strange occurrences were driving the family to distraction. With both of its male members away, one daughter ill, and the little boy dispatched to the country, the two remaining sisters determined to quit the house of evil associations. The crowds, too, were frightening them. During the week-end, mounted police were necessary in order to keep back the gaping mob which all day and night stood in the road and gazed open-mouthed, at nothing more thrilling than a couple of broken panes of glass. As I was leaving on the Monday a burly ruffian with a Russian accent accosted me and asked if he could 'mind the place' for me. He would have looked—and felt—much more at home in a *vodka* bar at Minsk. I declined his services—without thanks.

During the early part of the week Miss Smith and her sister decided to return to the house. On the Tuesday the editor of the *Daily Express* asked me if I would make the experiment of taking a medium to the house in order to see if she could get any 'impressions'. I consented. The psychic was a Miss X, the daughter of a well-known London professional man and, of course, an amateur.

The *Daily Express* representative was Mr. F. G. H. Salusbury, whom I knew. We visited Bury Road on Wednesday afternoon, January 25, 1928, arriving at the house about three o'clock. Mrs. West was there—the only member of the Smith family who entered the place that afternoon.

We took Miss X to every room in the house in order to discover if she received any 'impression'. She at once declared that the place made her feel 'miserable'. This was not particularly illuminating, as most suburban houses have the same effect upon me. But in the kitchen Miss X declared that she felt 'chilly'. There was a good fire burning in the room—in fact, the kitchen was the only apartment which was heated. Neither Mr. Salusbury nor I felt cool in this room; on the contrary, we felt much warmer. But Miss X continued to get colder and positively shivered. Her respiration slowed down and her hands were distinctly cold. We left her sitting by the fire watching Mrs. West do her household duties. We then continued our search of the house, carefully closing the kitchen door behind us.

We again examined the upper rooms of the house, inspecting and examining minutely every article of furniture, ornaments, etc., and noting their exact positions. The rooms on the top floor of the Bury Road house are divided by a passage which runs from the back to the front of the building. During our inspection of these rooms we must have traversed this narrow and well-lighted passage at least six or seven times. Neither of us noticed anything on the floor of the passage. We were in the front room when we both heard an object fall in some part of



the house. We immediately turned to go once more to the lower part of the building and simultaneously saw in the passage, with the light falling full on it, a piece of common yellow soap such as is used for washing clothes. It was lying right in our path, about six feet from the door of the room we had just entered. We both declared that it was utterly impossible for us to have passed that soap *once* without seeing it; to have done so seven times without noticing it or treading on it would have been a miracle.

Without touching the soap we made our way downstairs to the kitchen, the door of which was still closed. Both Mrs. West and Miss X declared that neither had moved during our tour of inspection: the door of the kitchen had not been opened and no one could enter the house except by the front door (which opened only on the inside) or through the garden, scullery and kitchen.

Mrs. West accompanied us to the top floor again and examined the soap, which she said belonged to the scullery. It showed no signs of having had a blow or of falling heavily. Miss X was still very cold and shivering, though she had just come from a warm kitchen. We stayed in the house for another half-hour, but nothing further happened.

Mr. Walter Smith returned home a few days after the incident of the soap. As I prophesied, he was found to be perfectly normal, and it was preposterous that he should have been compelled to leave his home. That was the end of the Bury Road affair, and the house was vacated soon afterwards.

\*      \*      \*      \*      \*

It is obvious that the occurrences which I have described were either genuine phenomena or were due to some mischievous person or persons with a very powerful motive for disturbing the peace of the locality.

My own first impression was that the ex-soldiers at the mental home had discovered that the Bury Road house was an

excellent target for their missiles. The angle at which portions of the house were struck originated this theory in my mind. There had also been 'friction' between the Smiths and the inmates of the mental home. But no normal external force could have smashed the crockery and broken the furniture *inside* the house. I was then faced with the alternative of suspecting the Smith family of deliberately destroying the home which had sheltered them for twenty-five years, or attributing the phenomena to a supernormal origin.

I at once acquitted the boy, Cyril, of having any guilty knowledge of the disturbances, assuming they were caused normally. In the first place, he was absent when many of the phenomena occurred; secondly, he had not the physical strength to inflict the damage which some of the furniture sustained. And with a house full of people any suspicious action on his part would have been noticed instantly. And on the one occasion when I saw him, he looked thoroughly scared. Though phenomena of the so-called *Poltergeist* type are often associated (as with Eleonore Zugun<sup>1</sup>) with adolescents, I was convinced that in the case under review there was no connection between the boy and the manifestations.

It has been suggested that the disturbances were deliberately planned by some of the members of the Bury Road family in order to frighten Smith *père* out of the house—for what reason is not stated. But that theory will not bear analysis. Though the most violent of the alleged phenomena occurred when Mr. Smith, senior, was in residence, the manifestations were afterwards so numerous and disturbing that, as we have seen, Mr. Smith, junior, was suspected of originating them and was subjected to considerable annoyance and personal discomfort *after* his father had left the house. And no family would deliberately smash up their home for the purpose of driving out one of their

<sup>1</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychiatrist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, pp. 227-72.

number, especially when that member is the head of the family and the responsible tenant. And it was *after* Mr. Smith senior's departure that the remainder of the family were subjected to the distracting attention of the public, police and Press.

The incidents of the gas-lighter, the cherub and the soap still puzzle me. On the three occasions when these objects were precipitated near me, I could never be *quite* certain that a normal explanation could not be found for the supposed phenomena. It must be admitted that the case presents some very unusual features. The removal of the two members of the household, together with the suggestion that the early disturbances were caused by the inmates of the sanatorium at the rear of the house, marks the Bury Road mystery as being decidedly out of the ordinary run of such cases. I feel convinced that the original trouble was caused by some of the soldiers who were receiving treatment at the private mental home. That the worry and anxiety caused by these disturbances reacted on some of the Smith family seems almost certain. Whether this reaction was a normal or extra-normal one is, in the absence of further evidence, a matter for speculation. But I consider that the evidence for the abnormality of some of the occurrences is rather stronger than that for the theory that the Smith family was responsible for all the trouble. And there, I am afraid, we must leave it.

## V. 'Grand Hotel' and Other Mysteries

Some of the most curious adventures which have fallen to my lot have been, so to speak, thrust upon me. In particular, the 'ghost of the Unter den Linden' (as I call it) was decidedly not of my seeking and proved to be the most unpleasant incident of a psychic (if really psychic) nature I have ever experienced.

A year or so after the War I decided to visit some of the larger German cities in order to hunt for books on magic. Owing to the very favourable *Valuta* (the mark was tumbling every day) I thought I could acquire them cheaply, and I was not mistaken. I visited Leipzig, Dresden, Hanover, Cologne and Berlin and picked up nearly two hundred works on magic for less than a pound sterling.

I arrived in Berlin on a Monday afternoon in September, and took a taxi to that hotel in the Unter den Linden made famous by Vicki Baum in her *Grand Hotel*. Those who have read this diverting story will be able to visualise the sort of place 'Grand Hotel' is, and the type of client it attracts. I need only remark that it is—or was—the most fashionable hotel in Berlin, and probably the largest. It was my first visit: normally, the hotel is too expensive for me and I usually stay at the Hotel Central, opposite the Friedrichstrasse Station, as it is more convenient for the railway and shops. But I was tempted to stay at 'Grand Hotel' on this particular visit owing, as I have remarked, to the fact that the rate of exchange was so much in my favour.

After a wash and the filling up of innumerable police forms, I thought I would stroll as far as the Café Bauer at the corner of

the Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse and have what then did duty for a cocktail before I returned to the hotel for dinner.

I commenced my walk and, in doing so, stopped at the corner of the Pariser Platz, which is close by, in order to purchase from a newsboy a copy of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* to ascertain what plays were running. I paid for my paper, looked up, and saw the most revolting travesty of a man it has ever been my misfortune to behold. He, too, was about to buy a paper.

How he came to be by my side I do not know to this day. Though the Unter den Linden was crowded, except for the boy and myself, every person was in motion. The impression I received was that the man appeared from nowhere, instantaneously, as if through a trap door. Even in a crowded thoroughfare one instinctively feels if a person stops by one's side. I will swear that there were only two of us when I put my hand in my pocket for the note; when I received the paper—a matter of a second—there were three of us.

I should like to describe accurately the appearance of the stranger. But I can no more do so than I can convey to the reader the exact effect the man had on me. He was about five feet eleven inches in height, thin build, and very upright. He was dressed entirely in black, with a long black overcoat and a round, clerical hat. His coat collar was turned up and buttoned round his neck.

There was nothing extraordinary about his attire: it was simply strange. *It was his face that was terrifying*, and the sudden shock of seeing it made me almost physically sick.

His face was long and thin, with gaunt features and ears that appeared much too large for him. It was of an even redness, the colour of new bricks, and appeared to have no skin on it; it might have been carved out of a joint of raw beef. His eyes were deep set, glassy, vacant-looking and expressionless. I could not see his hair and he appeared to have no eyebrows. I thought of the 'raw-head and bloody bones' of my nursery days.

As the newsboy handed me the paper, something compelled me to look up, and I was confronted with those terrible eyes. Not only was I startled at seeing anyone there, but those eyes almost petrified me. I appeared to look not at them, but *through* them, as if they were holes in his head instead of eyes. What struck me as extraordinary was the fact that, although I was looking at him full in the face, *he did not appear to see me*: his eyes were absolutely vacant and lifeless.

I hurried away from the human monstrosity as fast as I could, and it took a stiff glass of brandy to restore me to something like my normal self. By the time I arrived at the Café Bauer I was stone cold and shivering. I was not frightened, but the meeting with the living apparition had produced an extraordinary physiological effect upon me.

Next morning I had arranged to go to Potsdam. As I wanted to make a call at Spandau *en route*, I took a train to this suburb from the Lehrte Station, with the intention of joining the steamer that plies between Spandau and Potsdam. Spandau is at the confluence of the Spree and Havel, which latter river is much visited during the summer months.

My business in Spandau occupied very little time and by eleven o'clock I was ready for my steamer trip to Potsdam. I made my way to the Charlotten-Brücke and boarded the steamboat which I found alongside.

The steamers on the Havel are quite small, and the one I joined was, owing to the lateness of the season, almost empty, not more than a dozen people being on board. While waiting for the boat to start I wandered round the deck, and, to my horror, saw the 'ghost of the Unter den Linden' leaning against the iron ladder that led to the bridge, on the farther side of the vessel. He was reading a paper and, as I passed, he looked up and, for the second time, our eyes met. They were the same glassy, lifeless eyes and raw face that I had beheld at the corner of the Pariser Platz the previous afternoon. The man looked so

ghastly that I simply would not travel with him a yard if it could be helped. So I hurried off the boat, and caught another steamer, going in the opposite direction, across the broad Havel to the pleasure resort of Tegelort, where I spent the day. I could not help thinking it was a curious coincidence that I should have met the 'ghost' twice within eighteen hours.

The next day (Wednesday) was spent among the book dealers and various people I knew, and proved quite uneventful. The following evening (Thursday) I decided to spend at the Wintergarten theatre of varieties in the Dorotheenstrasse. This is a music-hall at which one can dine while watching the entertainment. I had already booked a table on the balcony overlooking the auditorium, and arrived just before nine o'clock. I enjoyed the meal and was just sipping my coffee when, happening to look straight ahead along the front row of tables, I saw that terrible creature for the third time. He was three tables ahead of me, apparently enjoying his meal, though he was eating like an automaton. He was in a faultless dinner jacket, which seemed to throw into prominence that terrible face and those awful staring eyes. He appeared to be entirely bald and his scalp was of the same brick-red hue as his face. As I gazed at him he raised his head and our eyes met. At least my eyes met his, and again I got the impression of looking into two holes in his head. Though we stared at each other, he appeared as if stone blind: not a vestige of expression was in those eyes, which might have belonged to a mummy. I could not help comparing him to one of those *dombies*<sup>1</sup> or animated corpses, revitalised by magic, which are made to work in the fields of Haiti, if we can believe the travellers who tell us these stories.

Almost sick at the sight of the horror in front of me, I changed my position and sat on the chair on the other side of the table, so that I now had my back to the stranger. I found that I could not see the entertainment from this angle,

<sup>1</sup>See *The Magic Island*, by W. B. Seabrook, London [1929].

so called a waiter and told him to remove my coffee, etc., to a table on the second tier; just above me. When I had settled down again I beckoned the head waiter and asked him if he knew the man who had caused me to change my seat. I stood up in order to point out the position of the table and found to my surprise that the stranger had already left the theatre. The head waiter made some inquiries concerning the diner, though no one seemed to know him. Curiously enough, the waiter who served the 'automaton' had noticed nothing peculiar in the man who, it was admitted, had departed suddenly for no apparent reason.

The 'ghost of the Unter den Linden' was beginning to get on my nerves. Though quite without fear in these matters, the sight of the man was nauseating and I could not help wondering to myself whether the 'corpse' deliberately put himself in my way—a possibility which sent cold shivers down my spine. Fortunately, I was leaving for home the next morning and, for the only time in my life, I was glad to get out of Berlin.

Friday morning I spent shopping; returned to 'Grand Hotel' for lunch; asked for my bill; had my bag brought down, and ordered a taxi. I was catching a train from the Friedrichstrasse Station that left just after two o'clock.

I was standing in the vestibule or lounge of the hotel waiting for the head waiter to bring the change from the notes I had given him when, for the fourth—and last—time, I saw the 'automaton'. He passed through the heavy swing doors like a robot, walked straight past me (it was the first time I had seen him walking), crossed the lounge and proceeded down a passage which, I think, led to several public rooms and (I am speaking from memory) a palm court. Just at that moment the head waiter returned and I at once asked him if he knew the man. As he could see only the back of the retreating figure, he said he did not recognise him. I replied that I particularly wished to know the name of the man. An under-manager of



the hotel was standing near and I repeated my request to him. The head waiter was told to ascertain who the guest was, and proceeded in the direction of the palm court. He returned in a few minutes with the information that the man he had seen just previously was nowhere to be found. I replied that that was absurd as he had just passed us. The under-manager then accompanied the waiter in a further search and returned in ten minutes *with the positive declaration that there was no trace of the man*. Every room in that quarter of the hotel had been explored; the public rooms, palm court and every nook and corner had been examined. I was told that it was impossible for anyone to have left the building from that side of the hotel, and that no escape could have been made by a window. The head waiter was just as astonished as myself, as he had seen the back of the tall military-looking figure as he passed down the passage. Unhappily, I had to catch my train or I would have searched the hotel myself. I left Berlin with the great mystery unsolved.

Looking at this case in retrospect, I am inclined to think that the whole affair is capable of a normal explanation. Many people have curious and unpleasant faces, and my meeting with the 'automaton' four times *may* have been accidental and an extraordinary coincidence. His disappearance in the hotel *might* have been explained normally if I had had time to unravel the mystery. That the man was *objective* (and not a mere hallucination) is proved by the fact that he was seen by two waiters (one of whom spoke to him) who admitted this fact.

I used to think that the case of the Berlin automaton must be unique, until, quite recently, I acquired a rare tract which describes a meeting with a similar unpleasant personage: *A Strange, True and Dreadful Relation of the Devils appearing to Thomas Cox a Hackney-Coach-Man; . . . First, in the habit of a Gentleman with a Roll of Parchment in his hand, and then in the shape of a Bear, which afterwards vanished away in a flash of Fire . . .*, London, 1684. It was an extraordinary affair, but Thomas rather spoils the story

by admitting that just previous to his adventure he 'called in at a Victualling house, where he drank a Pot or two of drink'. I cannot plead guilty to any such indiscretion!

I have had many curious experiences abroad; and, because I have done so much night travelling, I can make myself thoroughly comfortable in a sleeping-car or ship's cabin and enjoy a good night's rest. As a matter of fact, I am a very sound sleeper. Once, when a boy, I slept through a fire that consumed the house opposite; and the fact that the road was full of fire engines, police, and people, and our own house was harbouring what could be saved from the conflagration across the road, failed to disturb my sister or me. I make this digression to emphasise the fact that I do not easily awaken unless there is some very good reason for it, or something startles me into consciousness—as in the affair of the Orient Express, and the 'haunted sleeping-car'.

Early in May 1926 I was returning from Vienna, where I had been lecturing at the University and investigating the case of Eleonore Zugun (who afterwards became famous as the 'Poltergeist girl')<sup>1</sup> at the invitation of Professor Dr. Hans Thirring of Vienna University.

After an enjoyable stay in the Austrian capital, I joined the Orient Express at Vienna West, the train leaving, if I remember rightly, at about two o'clock in the afternoon. I had already booked my place in the *Schlafwagen* and, having settled down in my compartment, I extracted a note-book from my dressing-case and proceeded to write up the extraordinary affair of the Rumanian *Poltergeist* girl and her friend Dracu.

The afternoon and evening passed without untoward incident. What with meals and my literary labours, I discovered to my surprise that it was past eleven o'clock and time to turn in.

<sup>1</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, pp. 227-72

The compartment I was occupying consisted of two berths, but only one of the beds had been made up. I occupied the lower berth. I had chosen a compartment in the middle of the coach in order that a minimum of jolting would enable me to write in comfort. I was too experienced a traveller to find any difficulty in making myself comfortable in the somewhat confined space which was my bed, and in a very short time I was in a deep sleep. Before turning in I had switched off all the lights in the compartment except a deep blue one which was installed in case of emergency.

I had been asleep for what seemed only a few minutes when I was awakened as suddenly as if someone had fired a pistol shot by my side. I jumped up, and, for a moment, thought we had struck something. But the rhythmic hum of the wheels as they glided over the metals reassured me that, mechanically at any rate, everything was in order. I looked at my watch, discovered it was nearly two o'clock and realised that we must be nearing Frankfurt (Main). I slipped out of my berth, opened the door leading into the corridor and looked up and down the coach. Everything and everybody were quiet. I would have rung for the attendant but I knew that this tired and overworked official was snatching an hour's rest in some unoccupied compartment and I did not like to disturb him. But I was convinced that something had happened.

I turned in again, and at last fell into a fitful dream-broken sleep. For the second time in that memorable night I awoke as suddenly as if I had been shaken. Not only did I awake, but I had an unpleasant feeling that I was not alone in the compartment. I am not psychic—thank God!—but I am extremely sensitive to influences (especially hostile influences) around me, and I *felt* that something was wrong with that compartment. My watch informed me that it was nearly five o'clock and that we were approaching Cologne. It was already daylight, but I switched on all the electric lights I could find and searched my

compartment, the corridor, and the compartments—which I knew were unoccupied—contiguous to my own. I could find nothing amiss, but I still had that curious feeling that *something* had awakened me. I rang for the attendant.

When the official appeared I asked him point-blank what was wrong with the coach and, especially, my compartment. He declared that everything was in order, and that he had heard nothing. He suggested that I had been disturbed by the train going over the points. I retorted that in that case I should have got no sleep at all, as the coach must have crossed hundreds of points during the night. I refused to argue the matter further, ordered some tea and shaving water, and began dressing. Just as I finished my toilet we ran into Cologne Hauptbahnhof and I alighted to stretch my legs. The disturbances of the night still puzzled me.

The Orient Express arrived at Ostend punctually soon after ten o'clock, and the attendant came to know if I wanted my baggage conveyed to the boat. I handed him a tip and was preparing to leave the train when the man hesitated, beckoned me back into the compartment, and confessed that the particular coach we were in had a 'history'. This is the story:

About three years previously a representative of an Amsterdam diamond firm had been in Budapest with a large parcel of cut stones which he had instructions to submit to a certain Central European notability who was in the market for some specimen brilliants. It appears that the customer in question did not keep the appointment owing to a telegram having been wrongly delivered, and the representative found himself in the Hungarian capital with no client and a parcel of diamonds worth many thousands of pounds. He succumbed to temptation. He 'framed' a bogus assault and robbery, reported to the police that the diamonds had been stolen and telegraphed his firm to the same effect. During the police investigation he fled from Budapest, joined the Orient Express, which left at eight

o'clock in the morning, and got clear into Austria. He had booked through to Brussels, where, it is presumed, he hoped to sell the stones.

From the subsequent history of the case it appears that immediately he left Budapest a hue and cry was raised, but international red tape prevented his speedy arrest. A warrant was issued in Austria and at the frontier town of Passau he escaped, by a few minutes, the net that had been spread for him.

The Orient Express stops at Würzburg, and it was here that a friend of the fugitive met him, it is thought, by appointment. The friend was a woman, and for the minute or so that the train was in the station the couple were seen to converse excitedly in the compartment the man occupied—the identical compartment I was destined to sleep in three years later.

What transpired during that interview will never be known, as the woman was not traced. But it is thought that she informed him that the insurance company had obtained a warrant for his arrest and that a posse of Belgian police was waiting for him at the frontier town of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen). This is only surmise, but what is known for certain is that the diamond traveller blew out his brains within two hours of the train leaving Würzburg. The attendant heard the pistol shot—as I thought I did, and at about the same time and place—and rushed to the compartment. But the man was dead. The body was put out at Frankfurt. The diamonds were found intact.

That is the attendant's story, and I believe every word of it. He told me that several people had complained about my compartment and he never put passengers in there if it could be avoided. But I had booked my sleeper in Vienna, had insisted upon a central position, and it just happened that I had been allotted the fatal *wagon-lit*.

Adventure dogged me after I left the 'haunted' coach. Upon my arrival at Ostend quay I found that a general strike had been declared in London and, for some extraordinary reason,

the Belgian steamers to Dover had been suspended. I telephoned to Amsterdam to try and persuade the Amsterdam-London airplane to pick me up at Ostend: every seat was booked. Finally, I had to hire a car to take me across the sand-dunes to Calais, where, next morning, I caught a steamer for Dover, arriving home twenty-four hours late.

The affair of the 'haunted' sleeper reminds me that Mr. C. E. M. Joad and I once slept in an alleged haunted bed in a private museum at Chiswick. It was a great sixteenth-century bed of carved walnut, bearing a coat of arms in many colours. The owner of the bed purchased it in France for a 'song', because the dealer said it was 'unlucky'. She had it shipped to England.

Because the bed was so ornamental, its new owner decided to use it. The first night, she told us, she was hurled to the floor, striking her head against the wall as she fell. The indentation in the wall can be seen to this day. But she still insisted upon sleeping in the bed, and the 'falls' gave way to some less painful 'visions', one of which was that of a richly dressed man who was strangled and then placed in the bed. Other people also attempted to sleep in the bed, and were either thrown out or kept awake by some 'dreadful presence'. The owner decided to seek my aid.

As a feature of the case was the catapulting of the sleeper upon the floor, it occurred to me that there might be a strong spring under the bed that could, in some way, project a person touching it. I examined the bed very carefully by daylight, but could find no hidden mechanism.

Joad and I arrived at the museum about eleven o'clock on the night of September 15, 1932, and took up our vigil in the 'haunted bed'-room. It was a most extraordinary place. The room was packed with valuable antiques. I sealed the windows and door. I installed an electrical photographic set-up, with two

cameras focused on the bed, with a lead and switch which I could hold under the clothes. A press of the button, and two photographs would be taken.

We turned in at about 11.30. From my side of the bed I could see the first copy of the warrant which sent Charles I to his death. Near the foot of the bed was a print of Cromwell gazing into King Charles's coffin. In a corner of the room was a sixteenth-century oak chest with a carving depicting a lion about to devour a negro. It was all very macabre. I switched off the lights and awaited events.

The night passed peacefully, with one amusing interlude. An antique censer was suspended near the head of the bed. At about daybreak we saw it begin swinging slowly, and at once exclaimed: 'A phenomenon at last!' But we discovered that the movement was caused by the vibration of the tube trains which ran beneath the house. We experienced no further excitement that night. We were not thrown out of bed; we saw no visions; we had no bad dreams. In fact, nothing happened. Having taken a picture of ourselves in bed, we dressed and let ourselves out just as the milk was arriving. We heard nothing further about the haunted bed. Joad and I are first-rate exorcists!

Another foreign adventure which I must record occurred in Paris. Before me, as I write, are two unusual, though ordinary, objects: a copper disc in two pieces, and a two-inch cube of white wax. But if the objects themselves are ordinary, they have an extraordinary history.

It is a tradition that if one sits on the *terrasse* of the Café de la Paix long enough, eventually one sees every person one knows; it is a much rarer occurrence to be accosted by name by a person one has never known, or even heard of. But this is what happened to me one cold evening a few days before Christmas 1930.

I had just arrived from London and was stretching my legs

on the Grands Boulevards after dinner, before turning in for the night. Tired, I sank into a chair outside the Café de la Paix and ordered coffee and a liqueur. For nearly an hour I watched the living panorama that sways backwards and forwards, by day and by night, along the Boulevard des Capucines. Although a cold night, the *terrasse* was full and I was compelled to seat myself at a table on the very edge of the surging crowd—a prey to the weary advances of the prowling priestesses of Venus (one of them had a wooden leg) whose 'beat' took them past the café and who, quite mechanically, accosted me with their eyes, if not with their tongues.

I called for my *addition* and was about to depart hotelwards when a genial old soul in a long black cape and a *boulevardier* beard halted by my table, looked at me, hesitated, looked again and finally exclaimed in excellent English: 'A thousand pardons, sir, but have I the honour of addressing Monsieur Henri Preece?' I told him he had and that the honour was entirely his.

As I regarded him with some astonishment he hastened to explain the mystery. The stranger told me that he had just been reading an article of mine in *Nash's Magazine*<sup>1</sup> concerning a *séance* I had had with Mrs. Eileen Garrett, the medium, at which the alleged spirit of Conan Doyle had manifested. He had recognised me as the original of the excellent photograph reproduced in *Nash's*, and had ventured to accost me. I complimented him on his perspicacity and invited him to take the vacant chair at my table, at the same time recalling the waiter. The stranger introduced himself as Monsieur Roux.

After chatting for some time about mediums in general and Heinrich Nusslein's famous 'automatic' paintings<sup>2</sup> in particular, conversation drifted to the subject of my article, and we discussed my theory that what Mrs. Garrett had 'tuned in' to was

<sup>1</sup>Published simultaneously in *Nash's Magazine* (London) and *Cosmopolitan* (New York) for Jan. 1931. On sale Dec. 15, 1930.

<sup>2</sup>See 'The Automatic Art of Heinrich Nusslein', by Harry Price, in *Psychic Research*, Journal of the American S.P.R., Nov. 1928.



not the spirit of Doyle but his *personality* which had persisted after death. M. Roux then confided to me that although he was not psychic himself, he had a gift or faculty of 'externalising' his own vitality or energy, transforming it into heat, and projecting it. He said he could externalise the heat of his body, and convey that heat to an inanimate object a short distance away by some mental process he could not explain, but which demanded great concentration. I said I was interested, although I am afraid I looked rather bored: I was tired and had heard similar stories so many times.

M. Roux went on to inform me that he had raised the temperature of a glass of cold water to the extent of three degrees Centigrade, by merely looking at it for half an hour. He said the thermometer could not lie. I agreed. He declared that if he gazed steadily at a lighted wax candle it would be consumed more quickly to the extent of five millimetres per hour. I was not in a position to deny it. He described further experiments of a similar nature in an attempt to convince me of what he called 'exteriorisation of energy'.

The *boulevardier* then asked me what I thought of it all. I suggested that an ocular demonstration would be more convincing than sitting there in the cold talking about the alleged miracles, and he agreed. He apologised for not asking me to his one-room flatlet, in the Rue de l'Abbaye, and suggested that we might meet at the same café on the morrow. I said I would be there at five o'clock.

The next afternoon found me at the Café de la Paix at the time named. I want to be quite truthful and inform the reader that when alone in Paris I am usually to be found at the Café de la Paix at five o'clock; I was not, therefore, risking a wasted journey. Candidly, I did not expect to see M. Roux again, but I did him an injustice.

Punctually to the minute the cheery maker of miracles sailed up to my table, and before he had removed his gloves he pulled

out of his purse a copper disc, slightly larger than a penny, and nearly twice as thick. Both sides of the disc shone like a mirror.

When I had ordered his *parfait amour* (which I am sure tastes as good as it sounds) we got to business. He asked me to examine the disc carefully (all conjurers start like that) and to 'ring' it on the table. I did so, and was satisfied that it contained no hidden mechanism. Then I was told to hold the disc in the palm of my right hand, within a metre of his eyes. This I did, resting my elbow on the table. Without touching the disc or my hand, my friend gazed steadily at the piece of shining copper for, I should think, nearly ten minutes. At the end of that period he asked me if the disc felt warmer to my hand. I had to admit that I thought it did.

Of course, a copper coin gets warmer if held in or on the hand, as the heat of the body is conveyed to it; but I had to acknowledge the fact that the disc really did seem warmer than when normally held in the hand and, as an experiment, I closed my hand over the copper piece. It then appeared to get cooler.

I told M. Roux that I was really interested, and asked him to lend me the disc until the same hour next day, when I promised to return it to him. He acquiesced with delight, knowing that he had puzzled 'Henri Preece'.

I have been in the psychic business much too long to be unaware of the fact that suggestion and self-deception are responsible for many so-called miracles—especially in the case of cures claimed by 'psychic' healers. And I wondered to what extent suggestion had been responsible for the fancied hotting up of the disc. When I returned to my hotel I held the disc in my fist for nearly an hour in the hope that I should imagine it was getting warmer. My imagination was not equal to the task, and the disc obstinately refused to raise whatever latent heat it possessed. What suggestion had done—I argued—auto-suggestion failed to do.

Thinking the matter over in bed that night, I decided to try

an experiment on M. Roux. Next morning I made my way to the Boulevard St. Germain and purchased from the chemists, Poulenc Frères, a block of hard white wax, about two inches square and two inches deep. It had a fairly high melting-point.<sup>1</sup>

Punctually at five o'clock the Café de la Paix found M. Roux and myself seated at a corner table and, not without some misgivings, I produced my cube of wax. Could M. Roux melt it before my eyes? M. Roux was sorry, but he could not; but he would like to try an experiment of his own.

I was requested to hold the cube on the palm of my right hand and to place the copper disc on top of the wax. This I did. M. Roux then removed his gloves, placed the palms of his hands flat on the table, and calmly gazed at that disc for, I should imagine, fifteen minutes (I ought to have timed him but omitted to do so).

Was it my fancy, or was the disc sinking into the wax? Yes, the old man's claims appeared to be justified; the *copper had, apparently, sunk into the cube to the extent of half a millimetre!* I took the measurement at leisure in my laboratory (the impression the disc made looked deeper at the time), and thus confirmed M. Roux's claim that he could, apparently, externalise some sort of heat, energy, or vitality. M. Roux kindly presented me with the disc (which I cut in halves with a hack saw when I returned to London: it was all copper and nothing but copper), which I have to this day, together with the block of wax which—like myself—was so curiously impressed. I tried to get M. Roux to London for some scientific experiments, but he said he was too old, too poor, and hated to leave his beloved Boulevards, where he had spent every evening for more than thirty years. He was glad he had met me, asked me to give a message to 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle' (whom he admired) 'at the next *séance*', had another *parfait amour*, shook hands with

<sup>1</sup>Paraffin wax melts at 114° Fahrenheit, beeswax melts at 142° Fahrenheit. The melting-point of the wax I purchased would be about 125° Fahrenheit.

me, raised his hat—and departed. I was left with one more mystery to solve.

The above case reminds me of another occasion when a perfect stranger accosted me in a public thoroughfare. It is one of my most curious experiences.

One morning, in the middle of August 1925, I was walking down the Strand and stopped to look in an optician's window. Almost at the same moment a gentleman, accompanied by a lady and a youth, asked me if I could direct him to another optician in the Strand who was advertising a particular make of prismatic field-glass. I gave him the desired information, and we had a little chat about the technical details of various types of binoculars. Suddenly he exclaimed: 'Are you connected with the optical trader?' I replied that I took merely an academic interest in the science of optics, and remarked that he would never guess what I was particularly interested in. He said, 'Don't be too sure—I'm a thought-reader, and if I am not mistaken, you too are interested in psychic matters!' To say I was surprised at his reply is to put it very mildly indeed—I was astounded.

My new acquaintance, who turned out to be a Mr. A. S. Aldrich, junior, of Takapau, New Zealand, was touring Europe with his wife and son, and he told me that he felt *impelled* to speak to me as I was looking in the optician's window. He said he knew instantly that I was engaged in the investigation of the occult, and could not resist the opportunity of proving it. Since he was eight years old Mr. Aldrich has been clairvoyant, but he is now losing the faculty. He related some very curious incidents illustrating his gift—stories which were vouched for by his wife and son. I will relate one episode which comes under the category of what Professor Richet would call 'accidental cryptesthesia', and which really is a case of premonition or prevision.

Mr. Aldrich—who is a large landowner in New Zealand—

one day saw clairvoyantly a relative of his (a niece, I think) laid out as if for burial, and, as is his custom, wrote in his diary a detailed account of the vision. They had recently heard from the girl, and there was then no suggestion that she was not in good health. *Three days after* Mr. Aldrich saw the vision, they received a wire to say that the girl had that day met with an accident (I think she was thrown off a horse) and had died. Really, after our extraordinary meeting in the Strand, the incident I have related does not seem so very strange. If ever Mr. Aldrich reads this account of our meeting, I hope he will communicate with me.

In my capacity of Foreign Research Officer to the American Society for Psychical Research I scoured Europe in investigating the facts, frauds and fallacies of psychical research. From Oslo to Athens and from Lisbon to Bukarest I found many psychic adventures—but some of the major mysteries were encountered on British soil; one, in my own bedroom. For want of a better title, this particular mystery is down in my case-book as 'the psychic child'—but I have no evidence that it *was* a child, psychic or human.

I have already emphasised the fact that I am a sound sleeper, and seldom awake until about 6 a.m., my usual hour for rising. It was all the more extraordinary, then, that the soft pattering of a child's feet round my bedroom should have awakened me so thoroughly.

I live in a quiet Sussex village, and before the mighty grid spun its metallic web across the county, I habitually kept a powerful electric lantern by the side of my bed. One evening I retired to rest after a strenuous day and feeling as if I could sleep the clock round. Actually, I awoke in a very few hours. I did not merely 'wake up': something happened that instantaneously roused me to the full waking state. I was as wide awake as if someone had thrown me out of bed.

With the knowledge that I was wide awake came the discovery that somebody or something was in my bedroom, the door of which was, of course, closed. I could hear the soft patter of naked feet round my room as if a little child were running round the bed. Sometimes the pattering sounds came from *under* the bed, proving that whatever the intruder was, it was not of a great height.

My dressing-room leads out of my bedroom and the window of the former apartment is always open a few inches at night, even in the winter. The only entrance to the dressing-room is through my bedroom. As I lay in bed I considered what animal could possibly have climbed into my room, nearly forty feet from the ground. I knew that my dog was fast asleep in his bed by the kitchen fire, and I possessed no other animal. But the sound of the pattering was not that which could be caused by any animal with which I was acquainted, and no animal could have climbed in my dressing-room window, the only free entrance to my sleeping apartment.

For ten minutes I listened to the pattering round my room and turned over in my mind every possible thing that could produce such sounds, which, I reiterate, exactly resembled those made by a child of three running round the room in its bare feet. At any moment I could have told the precise position in the room of whatever was responsible for the disturbance. At last I decided to switch on my lantern. Choosing a moment when the sounds appeared nearest to me, I suddenly flooded the room with light—and the pattering stopped instantaneously. I jumped out of bed: it was exactly a quarter to four and (in January) quite dark.

The first thing I did was to look under the bed: there was nothing there. Then I examined the rest of my apartment, including the dressing-room: I drew blank. Determined to solve the mystery, if possible, I moved every article of furniture in the room—and found nothing. The window of my dressing-

room was open three and a quarter inches, my bedroom door and windows being closed. I explored the house without result. No one was about and my retriever was sound asleep in his basket in the kitchen, the door of which was closed. I returned to my room and, as it was by then nearly five o'clock, I dressed instead of going back to bed.

In my career as an investigator there have been few mysteries for which I could not find some sort of solution—but I must admit that the 'baby feet' in my bedroom puzzle me to this day. If it is possible for spirits to return to this earth, and demonstrate exactly as humans, then my 'psychic child' is capable of this explanation.

## VI. The Talking Mongoose

I have been asked to do some queer things during my thirty years' investigation of the alleged supernormal. For example, when lecturing in Paris, I was invited to take up my perch on top of the Eiffel Tower and investigate a 'haunted' kiosk, where ivories, cheap jewellery, and similar souvenirs 'simply vanished into thin air', and it was thought that the thief must be a psychic one. Again, a poor woman came to see me one day and stated that for three consecutive nights she had dreamt that a near relative, recently buried, was not dead, but in a trance. Could I procure for her an exhumation order and make some tests? Then there was the man who had secured a quantity of *peyotl*<sup>1</sup> (a plant from which an hallucinating drug is made) and suggested that, if I consumed enough of it, I could 'project my astral' and record my experience. Curious as these requests may appear, they are commonplace compared with one I received in the winter of 1932 from a lady in the Isle of Man. My correspondent informed me that a farmer friend of hers, a Mr. James T. Irving, had discovered in his house an animal which, after a little coaxing, had developed the power of speech, and was practically human, except in form. Would I care to interview the little beast? I replied that further data would be desirable before I decided to investigate the Manx prodigy. I wrote to the farmer.

I found Mr. Irving very helpful, and he confirmed all his friend had told me. In a letter he described the animal as being of a yellowish tinge, like a ferret. "The tail is long and bushy and tinged with brown. In size, it is about the length of a three-

<sup>1</sup>*Echinocactus Williamsii*.



parts grown rat in the body, without the tail.' The mongoose (for that is what the creature said he was when he became on friendly terms with his host) first became audible by making 'animal noises' behind the stained matchboarding with which the rooms in Mr. Irving's house are panelled. The noises consisted of 'barking, growling, spitting, and persistent blowing', which kept the family awake at night. Of course, this rather annoyed the farmer and he took steps to rout his unwanted guest. He used gun, trap, and poison in turn, but the knowing creature eluded them all.

About this period Mr. Irving had a bright idea. As the animal could make such curious noises, perhaps it could imitate a human being. So the farmer gave imitations of the calls of various creatures, domestic and others, and was astonished to find them accurately reproduced. 'In a few days' (I am still quoting from his original letter to me) 'we had only to name the particular animal or bird, and instantly, always *without error*, it gave the correct call.'

Mr. Irving has a daughter Voirrey, who, at the time my story opens, was about thirteen years old. It occurred to Voirrey to try the animal with nursery rhymes. This test was carried out and 'no trouble was experienced in having them repeated'. From that day onwards the 'talking mongoose' became an intimate and valued member of the Irving family. The voice is stated to be two octaves above the human voice, and very clear and distinct.

As time went on, it was quite obvious that the 'animal' (who is now entitled to quotation marks) had been capable of talking, laughing, singing, etc., from the day he took up his abode with the Irvings, and that the 'animal noises' and mimicking were intended as a humorous introductory 'leg-pull'. It is not quite clear whether the mongoose *said* his name was Gef, but that is what the Irvings called him and he said he liked it.

From a perch high up in the rafters, or from behind a con-

venient skirting-board, Gef told the farmer a good deal about himself. He said he came from India, where 'he had been chased by natives'. Apparently he belongs to the well-known *Herpestes mungo* family, first cousins of the ichneumons of North Africa. Some 'poor relations' in Egypt are known as 'Pharaoh's rats'.

When Mr. Irving and Gef became on more intimate terms, the latter mentioned the little matter of the shooting, etc. Mr. Irving explained that he thought Gef was just an ordinary animal out of the fields. Of course, he apologised; then they had a good laugh over it, and the incident closed.

A curious feature of the 'talking mongoose' case is that the creature is seldom seen by Mr. Irving. Very rarely, something dashes along a beam, or he glimpses the tip of a tail rounding a corner, and that is about all. On the other hand, his wife and daughter have often seen him face to face, and Voirrey has even attempted to photograph him. Once, Gef posed on the wall for her, but just as she was about to press the button, he darted off and was not heard for days. Gef explained that he is afraid of being caught—not by the camera, but by a trap. Hence his timidity. Sometimes Gef follows them to the nearest town when they go marketing, but always keeps on the far side of the hedge, though he chats gaily all the time.

Mr. Irving invited me to hear the phenomenon for myself, and kindly offered me the hospitality of his home during my visit. But I hesitated. In the first place, I was fully occupied with Rudi Schneider,<sup>1</sup> whom I was then investigating in my laboratory; secondly, the story I had heard sounded so preposterous that I simply could not take it seriously. Then I argued to myself that there *might* be something in it. After all, talking animals are fairly common—in print. The pages of

<sup>1</sup>See 'An Account of Some Further Experiments with Rudi Schneider', by Harry Price, *Bulletin IV* of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, 1933.

*A Thousand and One Nights*, *Æsop's Fables*, Sir J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*<sup>1</sup> and scores of books on mythology are full of talking beasts which are human in everything but shape. To-day, the Australian natives believe that the wild dog has the power of speech; and the Breton peasants credit all birds with language, which they try to interpret. The bear in Norway is regarded as almost a man, and the Red Indians consult the native bear *Kur-bo-roo* when they are in distress, and the Iowas converse with serpents. Even in psychical research talking animals are not unknown. Who has not heard of the Elberfeld horses,<sup>2</sup> Muhamed, Zarif, Hanschen and Barto? Certainly, these equine wonders spoke with their hoofs, and not with their mouths—but they made themselves understood just the same. And poor blind Barto was said to be more intelligent than many who came to gape at him! Then there was Rolf,<sup>3</sup> the Mannheim 'talking dog', Black Bear,<sup>4</sup> the Briarcliff 'thinking pony', and many others. And we have all kept talking parrots. I came to the conclusion that perhaps a talking mongoose was not so *very* extraordinary, and decided to investigate. I asked a friend, Captain X—very shrewd and not easily hoodwinked—to make some preliminary inquiries on the spot.

X arrived at the Isle of Man on February 26, 1932, and in due course presented me with his report. It is an extraordinary document. On the first night he kept watch at the farm until about 11.45, and as there was nothing moving he decided to

<sup>1</sup>See *The Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion*, by Sir James George Frazer, London, 1911-25 (3rd edition, revised, in 12 vols.).

<sup>2</sup>See *The Unknown Guest*, by Maurice Maeterlinck, London, 1914.

<sup>3</sup>See 'Rolf of Mannheim: a Great Psychological Problem', by Dr. William Mackenzie, in *Proceedings*, American S.P.R., Vol. XIII., Aug 1919.

<sup>4</sup>See: 'The Briarcliff Pony', by J. Malcolm Bird, *Journal of the American*

return to his hotel. He left the house accompanied by the farmer, but just as he reached the door he heard a very shrill voice scream out: 'Go away! who is that man?' Mr. Irving gripped his arm and said, 'That's it!' Then came some more talk, but X could not understand what was said. X decided to remain in the house, and returned to the other room, when the voice at once ceased. He stayed for another fifteen minutes and then returned to his hotel.

The next day X was at the farm early and was greeted with the news that Gef had been talking a lot since the previous night, and had promised to speak to him if he sat in a certain spot. Incidentally, Gef informed the farmer that he had taken a sly glance at X and did not like him! So X was told that he would have to shout out: 'I *do* believe in you, Gef!' if he wanted to hear the mongoose! X did this and patiently waited all day for the shrill voice. While they were having tea, Gef threw a packing-case needle into the room and it hit the teapot. X was told that Gef was always throwing things about.

At 7.45 there was a shrill scream from above-stairs, and X could hear Gef talking to Mrs. Irving and Voirrey. X shouted up the stairs: 'Won't you come down? I believe in you!' Gef replied, 'No, I don't mean to stay long, as I don't like you!' As the mongoose was still talking, X quietly approached the stairs and began to creep up to the bedroom. But, unfortunately, the top stair had a loose tread which X stepped on—and slithered down the staircase, making a terrible noise! Gef shrieked out: 'He is coming!'—and vanished. Nothing more happened, and X returned to London.

The most extraordinary part of this amazing case is that Mr. Irving has kept a sort of diary—in the form of letters—of Gef's doings, and it rivals the *Arabian Nights* in the fantastic improbabilities which the record contains. Before me are two hundred quarto typed sheets, and every page describes a miracle: I will mention some of the most interesting incidents.

In June 1932 Gef told the farmer that he had been chased in India by natives, and frequently shot at. In the same month Gef became tamer and allowed the farmer's wife and daughter to stroke him and feel his teeth—while he was on a beam. They fed him on bacon, sausages, bananas, chocolate, etc., but he would *not* touch milk and water. Then he began killing rabbits for the family. He strangled them and thoughtfully left them outside in a convenient position, with their legs in the air. During the next year or so, he slaughtered scores of them—and the faunal equilibrium of the district was in danger of being upset! Then he commenced speaking a language supposed to be Russian. *Ne pani amato aporusko* was one sentence which was recorded phonetically. In August he sang two verses of a Spanish song, and recited four lines of a Welsh poem. Then he spoke Arabic, and revealed the fact that he could understand the deaf and dumb alphabet.

In 1934 Gef began making little trips to the nearest town and on his return told the farmer what certain people had been doing. This was proved to be correct. Then he became clairvoyant and told the farmer what was happening ten miles away—without leaving the farm. Sometimes he was *seen* out of doors. Questioned as to whether he was a 'spirit', Gef said: 'I am an earth-bound spirit.'

In June 1934 the farmer asked Gef if X could visit him again. 'Yes,' was the reply, 'but not Price. He's got his doubting cap on!' In July he began doing little tricks for the farmer's friends. A person would go outside in the porch and place some pennies on a stone. Gef, with his eye to a squint-hole, would then say whether they were heads or tails. Sometimes he was right.

In October 1934 another reference was made to me. Gef said he liked X, 'but not Harry Price. He's the man who puts the kybosh on the spirits!' In December 1931 he became so violent in his speech and in his threats towards Voirrey that the girl's

bed was moved into her parents' room. He became friendly again, and in May 1932 Voirrey returned to her own room.

In March 1935 X received some fur and hairs which Gef had kindly plucked from his back and tail. Having removed the hair, Gef deposited it in an ornament on the mantelpiece, and told the farmer where to find it. As the hair was sent for identification purposes, I forwarded it to Professor Julian Huxley, who handed it to Mr. F. Martin Duncan, F.Z.S., the authority on hair and fur. Mr. Duncan went to much trouble in an attempt to identify the hair. In a letter to me, he says:

'I have carefully examined them microscopically and compared them with hairs of known origin. As a result I can very definitely state that the specimen hairs never grew upon a mongoose, nor are they those of a rat, rabbit, hare, squirrel, or other rodent; or from a sheep, goat or cow. I am inclined to think that these hairs have probably been taken from a longish-haired dog or dogs.'

Mr. Duncan based his opinion upon a comparison of the hairs of various animals, including a wolf and of a collie dog. He found 'that both these, in the shape and pattern of the cuticular scales, and of the medulla, had a marked resemblance to the cuticular scales, and medulla of your specimens, sufficiently close to make me think that very probably yours are of canine origin.' Mr. Duncan also considered that they had been cut from the animal, as he 'could not detect a single hair showing a root-bulb'. Later, he kindly made some photomicrographs of Gef's hairs and, for comparison, some taken from a golden cocker spaniel and a red setter.

I could fill many pages of these *Confessions* with extracts from Mr. Irving's record, but what I have written is some indication of the amazing things Gef is alleged to have said and done. As he became acquainted with the family, he developed a wit which at times was a bit rude. He called Mr. Irving 'Jim' and nick-named him 'Pots'. When Gef was hungry, he would say,

'Well, Jim, what about some grubbo?' and his nonsense would sometimes keep the family awake at night. As his manifestations became so frequent, my friend X decided to pay another visit to the island. He arrived there on May 20, 1935. He heard Gef scream and say, 'Coo-ee! coo-ee!' in the dark, on the way to his hotel. Gef also did the coin trick for him. There were several other puzzling incidents, which X related to me on his return; so puzzling, in fact, that I decided I would see Gef myself.

Mr. Irving wrote that he would be delighted to see me and would make all arrangements for my visit. Unfortunately, on receipt of the letter announcing my decision, Gef suddenly disappeared. I waited for a week or so, but the mongoose was still missing. It was not an unusual occurrence for Gef to slip away for a few days, but an absence of two weeks was unusual. At the end of a month he was still missing, but I decided not to alter my plans and arranged to travel to the Isle of Man on Tuesday, July 30, 1935. As I wanted a witness in case Gef *should* put in an appearance, I asked Mr. R. S. Lambert, the editor of *The Listener*, if he would accompany me. He kindly consented.

We arrived at Douglas at 6.45 p.m. and were met by Mr. Irving with a car. After a long drive into the interior, we reached a famous beauty spot, where we found a comfortable inn and a welcome meal. During dinner Mr. Irving related the complete story of the talking mongoose, which, alas! was still missing. After our repast we decided to visit the haunt of Gef. This was easier said than done, as Mr. Irving lives in an isolated farmstead seven hundred and twenty-five feet above sea-level, on the summit of what is almost a mountain. There is no proper road to the house, but after an hour's stiff climb up a precipitous and slippery mule track, we reached the desolate upland where Mr. Irving lives. It was almost dark, and had not Mr. Irving piloted us the entire distance, we should have been hopelessly lost. As we approached the house Mr. Lambert and I were

started by an animal suddenly bounding into our midst: it was 'Mona', the Irvings' three-year-old collie sheepdog, who had heard his master's voice.

We at last reached the house and were introduced to Mrs. Irving and Voirrey—now a good-looking girl of seventeen—whom we found very intelligent, shy, and rather quiet. Mrs. Irving is a charming and dignified lady who gave us a friendly welcome and asked us to make ourselves at home. The Irvings do not belong to the farmer class. Mr. Irving was a successful Liverpool business man who, at about the beginning of the War, bought the lonely farmstead, hoping to make a living by sheep-breeding, etc.

As we sat round the paraffin lamp in the small, dark-panelled living-room, we heard the Gef story all over again. Mr. Lambert and I plied the Irvings with innumerable questions concerning their prodigy, and received answers which invariably tallied with what Mr. Irving had recorded in his letters. The family was heartbroken at Gef's continued absence. Mrs. Irving was convinced that the mongoose was still about the house, probably listening to every word we were saying. She addressed a few words to him in the hope that her appeal would touch a sympathetic chord somewhere. There was no response. Then I addressed a little speech to the four walls of the room, hoping Gef would hear me. I pointed out that we had come a long, long way on his account and that we were entitled to some manifestation: a few words, a little laugh, a scream, a squeak, or just a simple scratch behind the panelling. I even invited him to throw something at me. But all to no purpose: Gef was definitely not in a talking mood. Mrs. Irving said she still thought he was about somewhere. Although he had not been heard for a month, about a fortnight previous to our visit a saucepan of water mysteriously fell off the range in the living-room and swamped Irving's shoes. No one was in the room, and it was thought that Gef was responsible. We heard a



good deal of Gef's doings: how he travels to the nearest town on the back axles of motor-cars and buses; how he gets to know the names of many of the drivers, and how he picks up bits of scandal which he hears in the town. We also learnt Gef's age: he was eighty-three on June 7, 1935. All these details of Gef's life—and many more—we heard as we sat round the oil lamp waiting for him to manifest. Then midnight struck and we decided to return to the village. By the light of two electric torches we groped and stumbled our way down the mountain path, again accompanied by Mr. Irving, and finally reached our inn.

Neither Mr. Lambert nor I slept very well. The mongoose problem obsessed our minds and made sleep difficult. Was the whole affair a fraud from A to Z? Was it a plot (lasting four years) to fool the countryside? If so, what was the motive? Were the Irvings engaged in a clever and picturesque conspiracy? Was there any sort of animal at all? Was there any real evidence whatsoever that Gef had been heard? These and similar questions raced through my brain. If a plot, then the Irvings were consummate actors. There was no apparent motive, and no financial gain. In the early days it was said that Voirrey was a 'natural ventriloquist'—whatever that is—and responsible for the Gef impersonation. But the Irvings state that Gef has been heard while Voirrey was under observation; in fact, the three members of the Irving family have, in turn, been absent from home while Gef was said to manifest. Irving himself is an amiable and very intelligent business man of about sixty years of age. Could any intelligent person remain in a house for four years without becoming aware of the fact that a hoax was being played on him and the public by another member of his household? I fell into a fitful sleep before I had answered one of these questions satisfactorily.

I awoke just before eight o'clock. I say 'awoke', but actually I was in that hypnopompic state between sleeping and waking,

when a thin, shrill voice (which appeared to come from the end of the bed) said: 'Hullo! hullo! come along! come along!' and some chattering which I could not interpret. With thoughts of Gef still uppermost in my mind, the 'voice' startled me into complete consciousness. But, alas! it was only mine host's parrot whose matutinal mutterings had floated in through my open window from the kitchen across the road.

After a tour of the Island and a good lunch, Mr. Lambert and I again climbed the mountain in search of Gef. We reached the Irvings' home just before four o'clock and were able to take stock of the place by sunlight. The farmstead appeared even more lonely than it did by night. For mile after mile there was nothing to be seen except the undulating hills covered with short turf, scrubby gorse, and sod hedges. There were no trees and few birds—hardly a living thing<sup>1</sup> except an occasional hawk winging its solitary flight across the mountain. But the views were superb. To the west was a glorious vista of mountain, glen and sea, bathed in sunlight which made St. Patrick's Channel look like a sheet of glass. Still farther west, the Mountains of Mourne were silhouetted against an azure sky. A little above Irving's place is a prominence from which, without leaving the spot, can be seen England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. By daylight we saw that the house was a small two-storey affair, made of Manx slate slabs cemented together. The outside walls were faced with cement, which gave it a grey colour. A projecting porch, with a small, deep window, made the place seem larger. Inside the house the walls are panelled, with a space of about three inches between walls and woodwork. The ground floor consists of a small porch, a parlour, the principal living-room, and a pantry-kitchen. Upper floor consists of two bedrooms. There is panelling everywhere.

The Irvings were kindness personified, and did everything

<sup>1</sup>There are no snakes, toads, badgers, moles, squirrels, voles or foxes in the Isle of Man.

for us—except produce Gef! However, Mr. Irving personally conducted us over the house and pointed out Gef's haunts. We saw numerous peep-holes; cracks through which Gef threw things at 'doubting' visitors; squint-holes through which the mongoose watches the Irvings and interrupts the conversation with facetious and sometimes rude remarks. We saw the runs behind the panelling by means of which Gef can skip, unseen, from one room to another, upstairs or down. In Voirrey's room we were shown 'Gef's sanctum', really a boxed partition, on top of which Gef dances to the gramophone and bounces his favourite ball. The fact that every room is panelled makes the whole house one great speaking-tube, with walls like sounding-boards. By speaking into one of the many apertures in the panels, it should be possible to convey the voice to various parts of the house. Apparently, Gef does this.

We spent the evening with the Irvings; we took photographs and played with Mona, and walked round the outbuildings and the nearby fields, where we were shown the spots where Gef deposits the rabbits which he kills for his hosts—as some sort of recompense for his board and lodging! Speaking of Mona, it is curious that Mr. Martin Duncan *thought* that Gef's hairs had come from a collie dog. Is it possible that Gef surreptitiously clipped the hairs from various parts of Mona's anatomy, and foisted them on to the Irvings as specimens of his own hirsute covering?

About midnight we decided that Gef had no intention of coming into the open, and that we had better go home. We had spent many pleasant hours under the hospitable roof of the Irving farmstead, but we could not determine whether, in our rôle of investigators, we had taken part in a farce or a tragedy. No dramatist could have invented a more amazing plot or a *mise en scène* better suited to the characters of the play which is being enacted on the windswept uplands of the Isle of Man. We have been told that we discovered nothing during our

quest of the 'talking mongoose'. But that is not true: we discovered why witches were hanged in the seventeenth century, and why Lord Chief Justice Hale publicly avowed his belief in broomsticks as a reasonable and usual means of locomotion.

Gef returned to the farm on the same evening as we left it—perhaps we passed him on our way down the mountain! He told Mr. Irving that, although he had 'had a few days' holiday', he was present at the house during our visit, and heard all we said. He gave various excuses for not showing himself, and one of them was that Mr. Lambert was a 'doubter'. He admitted knocking over the saucepan of water in the living-room. After our return home this clever mongoose made impressions of his paws and teeth in plasticine, and Mr. Irving sent them to me. He (Gef) also dictated to the farmer a complete description of himself, and from these particulars a drawing was made and published.<sup>1</sup> Our adventures created extraordinary interest in London and the B.B.C. asked me to broadcast the story.<sup>2</sup> As these *Confessions* go to press, Gef is still exchanging wisecracks with Irving; still dancing to the gramophone on top of his 'sanctum'; still screwing rabbits' necks for the Irving table; and, I am afraid, still impressing a number of rather credulous people.

<sup>1</sup>For a complete, illustrated account of this extraordinary affair, see *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap: a Modern 'Miracle' Investigated*, by Harry Price and R. S. Lambert, Methuen, 1936.

<sup>2</sup>Broadcast from the North Regional Station, Saturday, October 12, 1935.

## VII. Some Curious Claims to Mediumship

Anyone can be a 'medium'; whereas, if you keep a dog, run a fried-fish stall, or drive a motor-car, you must have a license. But you can practise 'mediumship' with impunity. The law does not 'inspect' you; you are not required to fill up forms or sign on dotted lines, or even include the amount of your 'spoils' in your Income Tax return—because professional mediumship is *illegal*. You can gaze into a crystal, call up 'spirits', produce voices from a tin trumpet, go into a trance, 'psychometrise', materialise 'ectoplasm', see visions, take spirit photographs, or read the stars—and you are absolutely immune from every kind of tax or official supervision. The reason for this is that the law does not recognise such a thing as mediumship. The psychic not only has no legal status, but his profession is actually illegal under the old laws, which have never been repealed. Legally, he is a 'rogue and a vagabond' and is sometimes prosecuted as such.

Though I have stated that a medium is immune from official supervision, he can very easily become entangled in the meshes of the law. He definitely breaks the law if, for a consideration, he predicts the future: he is prosecuted under the Witchcraft and Vagrancy Acts<sup>1</sup> and can be fined or imprisoned. One frequently reads in the Press of such prosecutions, and usually the offenders are convicted either for pretending to tell fortunes or for obtaining money under false pretences. The difference between a certain type of medium and a 'fortune-teller' is so subtle that the burly policeman and his wife (disguised as 'sitters'), when they visit the psychic's parlour, can hardly be

<sup>1</sup>Vagrancy Act, 5 Geo. IV. c. 83, and Witchcraft Act, 9 Geo. II. c. 5.

expected to recognise it. The result is a fine of forty shillings, or seven days. It is sad to think that these modern representatives of Delphi and Dodona should have sunk to the level of a vagrancy act!

Just as the medium has no standing in law, so he has no status among his brethren. He receives no training, and no degrees. There are no 'tests' for a medium except the tests of a laboratory properly equipped for scientific observation. And this usually applies only to a *physical* medium. If you go to a clairvoyante—or other *mental* medium—and she tells you that over your left shoulder she sees the spirit of your aunt Emma, in a blue dress with pink spots, you cannot contradict her! True, you may never have had an aunt Emma, but that does not matter. You pay your guinea all the same and go home wondering.

I have made these few introductory remarks in order to emphasise how difficult it is for an investigator to choose his material. As, apparently, mediums—like poets—are born and not made, one cannot determine the genuineness or otherwise of a psychic without the expenditure of a great amount of time, money and energy. A man has only to advertise himself as a medium in the spiritualist Press, and the credulous flock to him. As these people seldom admit that there is such a thing as a 'fraudulent medium', of course the fakers prosper. Even Sir Oliver Lodge, in the witness-box during the Meurig Morris action against the *Daily Mail*, said (I am quoting from *The Times* report<sup>1</sup>): 'I hear about fraudulent mediums, but I have not come across them.' If only I could boast of Sir Oliver's experience!

If I were to examine all the people who come to me and state they possess abnormal powers, I should want at least five *séance*-rooms instead of one, and every moment of my time would be occupied in testing these pseudo-psychics. In many

<sup>1</sup>See *The Times* for April 13, 1932.

cases, I find the trouble is a mental one and invariably recommend the applicant to seek medical advice. Some of these cases are very pathetic. A few of my callers produce written 'evidence' that they are psychic and these I usually test—generally with negative results. Then there is the 'spellbinder' type of showman who hopes to extract a few guineas from us in return for some stale 'psychic' tricks that can be found in any shilling conjuring book. These performers do not usually press their claims when I inform them that I possess the world's largest collection of works on trickery and deceptive methods. Sometimes a friend recommends an alleged medium to us and we devote much time and trouble in investigating the case.

I will now relate my adventures with some of the alleged mediums who claimed extraordinary powers which, however, slumped badly under scientific examination.

A year or so ago I received many Press cuttings relating to a certain Joanny Gaillard, a shoe dealer, of Lyons. This man claimed that he possessed the amazing faculty of being able to sterilise or petrify organic substances by merely passing his hand over them. He said he could mummify or magnetise such objects as fruit or meat. He took two lamb chops, placed them on separate plates, and one of them he 'magnetised' once or twice per day. After several days the chop that he had been thus treating was dry and hard while the other was beginning to decompose. Another experiment was made with a plucked pigeon, with similar results. These are the stories we heard. Gaillard also used to 'heal', and it was claimed that his 'power' or 'fluid' had a germicidal or sterilising effect, even to the extent of arresting or dispersing malignant growths. People flocked to him to be cured, and he did so well that, I was informed, he sold his boot and shoe business.

Of course I was deeply interested and wrote to Gaillard asking that his powers should be tested scientifically at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research. I offered him £50 for

a short series of tests. He accepted, but later wrote and asked for £100. This procedure was so unsatisfactory that I refused to increase my offer and awaited developments.

In the meantime, our Paris correspondent and council member, M. René Sudre, had also taken up the case. He and others formed themselves into a commission to test Gaillard. The commission consisted of M. Sudre, Professor Dr. Victor Pauchet of the Amiens Medical School, Dr. Dausset, the radiological head of the principal Paris hospital, Dr. Kohn-Abrest, the head of the toxicological service of the city of Paris, and other experts. For the purposes of the test the following objects were purchased: two tench, two mutton chops, two pieces of veal liver, and two unplucked larks.

The first article of each pair was treated by Gaillard, and the second served as a control or check. Every morning and afternoon, for eight days, Gaillard held two of the objects in his hands, and two in the crook of the elbows between forearm and upper arm. He held them for an hour at a time. At the end of eight days it was found that the objects that Gaillard had 'sterilised' were in the same stage of putrefaction as those that had been sealed up in a safe. The test had *not* demonstrated that Gaillard possessed any power whatsoever.<sup>1</sup>

Another very interesting aspirant to psychic honours was Madame Eugénie Picquart, the French 'transfiguration medium'. I was introduced to Madame Picquart in Paris in September 1927 during the Third International Congress for Psychical Research,<sup>2</sup> which I attended as Director of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research. The lady, a widow aged sixty, claimed that in the trance state, and in full light, she

<sup>1</sup>See 'Two Adventures in Metapsychics and Occultism', by René Sudre, in *Psychic Research*, Journal of the American S.P.R., Vol. XXIII, No. 3, New York, March 1929.

<sup>2</sup>See *Le Compte Rendu Officiel du Troisième Congrès International de Recherches Psychiques à Paris Septembre-Octobre 1927*, Paris, 1928.



could assume the personalities of various deceased persons, such as a French general, Coquelin (the actor), Sarah Bernhardt, a young child, an ancient Egyptian, etc. It was alleged that her face underwent rapid changes, with the result that her features expressed the characteristics of those by whom she is said to be 'controlled'.

I had a *séance* with Madame Picquart at a friend's flat in Paris, and I witnessed a most extraordinary performance. She appeared to go into a sort of self-induced cataleptic trance, and immediately after both her face and manner underwent several curious changes. She danced and rolled head over heels; she was a soldier, sailor and parson in turn.

In a quarter of an hour her expression and entire appearance seemed to assume still another personality, though I could not identify it. Then her face became drawn and wrinkled. Then her top lip became white, and she assumed a military demeanour: I was told it was a reincarnation of a famous French general. I was interested in the performance from a psychological point of view, but was doubtful if there was anything psychic about it. But I had heard such good accounts of her that, a few months later, I invited Madame Picquart to London, where she arrived in July 1928. She arranged to give us six *séances*.

Madame Picquart brought with her a special *séance* suit which consisted of thick black woollen tights, over which she placed a flowing black gown. She was always attired in this garb at the experiments held in my laboratory.

At the first *séance* she stood before us, in full light, with a strained look and vacant expression. Then her hand flew to her hair, which she tugged this way and that until it was entirely disarranged: we were told she was entranced. From a friend she took a sheet of stiff white paper, a pair of scissors and some pins. Out of the paper she cut a man's shirt front and placed it on her chest. Then she took a piece of black cloth, which she draped over her to look like a coat, complete with lapels. In



As 'Coquelin'



As an old French judge



As Mephistopheles



As an Egyptian mummy

Impersonations by Madame Eugénie Picquart, the 'transfiguration medium'.



quick succession she cut out a pair of paper 'gloves', some paper cuffs, and picked up a white walking-stick which she had brought with her. Then she assumed a dramatic pose and her friend announced that the medium was being 'controlled' by Coquelin, the actor.

It was a clever performance and much ingenuity was shown in turning to account the bits and pieces with which she decked herself out to look like a man. Also, it was emphasised, she did the 'dressing up' without the aid of a mirror. But the 'medium' was no more psychic than the paper I am writing on. If the trance was genuine (which I doubt), the 'transfiguration' into 'Coquelin' was accomplished entirely by the accessories she employed, plus a little acting.

The next impersonation was that of an Egyptian mummy, but somehow I was not so impressed with this character as I was the previous year when I saw her assume the same pose in Paris. We witnessed the 'growing' of the moustache (merely a faint whitening of the skin on the upper lip) and the face becoming drawn. But it required a good deal of imagination to regard the 'mummy' as anything but Madame Picquart playing a part.

At a further experiment (I photographed most of the 'impersonations'), the 'medium' assumed the part of a little boy and hopped and skipped about over the chairs—not bad going for a woman of sixty! Then she became an old French judge, an effect due entirely to the fact that she blackened her upper lip with burnt cork and pinned odds and ends of paper about her person in order to produce the desired impersonation. This was ingenious and very amusing: but psychic! . . . I informed Madame Picquart that it was useless to continue the experiments as we were not convinced that the abnormal played any part in her performances. She then left for Paris in the guise of her real personality—that of a rather disappointed and very typical French widow.

Not all the people who come to us are obsessed with the idea that they are psychic: some think they are possessed of devils; some imagine they are being bewitched or 'overlooked' by persons who wish to do them harm; others have extraordinary theories as to the nature of spirits and leave us tracts on the subject; a few, under the impression that we are a sort of clinic, come to us to be healed of various disorders—mostly imaginary. And the mechanically-minded bring us machines (such as Melton's 'psychic telephone'<sup>1</sup>) which, they maintain, will enable us to get in touch with the spirit world by a short cut and without the aid of a medium.

I must confess that the majority of these people merely bore me, and the mentally-ailing I am sorry for. But it is the charlatans who are *amusing*: the pseudo-mediums, the fakers, those who have acquired 'mediumship' by means of a correspondence course (hoping to make something out of it) and—last but not least—those who think we are a philanthropic institution and come hoping to extract money from us.

One 'spellbinder' who thought he could line his pockets at the expense of our credulity I call 'The Man from Oshkosh'. It happened like this. One day my secretary announced that the Rev. George B——, from Oshkosh, Wis., was in the office and would like to see me. It is not often that foreign members of the cloth find their way to my laboratory; but I was certain that anyone from Oshkosh, Wis., must be interesting, so I told her I would see him. When the visitor arrived in my sanctum, I nearly fell off my chair. I had expected some sort of an orthodox parson; the thing that arrived might have stepped clean out of a gangster drama from the 'talkies'. It was a Chicago racketeer *in excelsis*. When I had recovered my breath, and with my finger on the bell push, I asked him what he wanted. He informed me that he was the pastor of a small spiritualist church

<sup>1</sup>See *A Psychic Telephone*, by Frederick Reginald Melton (*i.e.* Melin), Nottingham, 1921.

in Oshkosh, Wis., and that he was travelling Europe in search of material for a lecture tour. Could he have some photographs or lantern slides of my laboratory? I said he could not, and did he want anything else? It was then that he informed me that he was also the leading medium of Oshkosh, Wis., and that his real reason for inflicting himself upon me was that he wanted a job. He said he was very hard up, and nearly 'all in'. 'Another week, doc., and I'm sunk!' Could I help him? I said I was afraid I could not. He had too much local colour, not to mention a pronounced atmosphere. Then he offered to teach me crap shooting: I resisted the temptation and remarked that it did not sound respectable. Finally, he offered to demonstrate his mediumistic powers before me. I consented.

He pulled out his pocket book, tore a page from it, and handed it to me. He asked me to tear it into six pieces of equal size. Having done this, I was requested to write the names of five living friends, and one dead one, on the slips. I was told to turn my back while I wrote the names and folded the papers. This I did. The 'reverend' from Oshkosh, Wis., then asked me to hold the 'dead' billet in my hand, he placing his hand over mine 'in order to make contact with the cerebral vibrations emanating from the paper', and so that he could 'tune in his personality' to that of the aforesaid emanations. I looked duly impressed. After the emanations had done their worst, I was asked to place all the billets in a hat and shake them up. I obeyed. I was then asked to light a Bunsen burner and slowly consume each billet in the flame. At the fourth burning the medium shouted: 'Blow it out!' I did this (not literally), opened the partly-destroyed paper, and admitted that on it was the name of the person (purely fictitious) alleged to be dead. I was impressed.

I was convinced of several things, amongst them being the following: (a) the medium did *not* see the names I wrote, and, had he done so, it would not have helped him; (b) he did *not*

handle the papers; (c) when the papers were mixed it was quite impossible to recognise any particular one; (d) that the fact of his using his own paper did not affect the result. I remarked that the trick (a pained expression clouded his countenance), I meant experiment, was a good one and asked him to do it again.

The second time I used my own paper and sent him out into the passage while I wrote upon, and folded, the billets. Then I called him in; he 'contacted' as previously—with exactly the same result.

I persuaded him to do it a third time and then I noticed that when 'making contact' he held my hand (containing the 'dead' billet) in a peculiar manner; in fact, he inserted the forefinger of his right hand into my fist, and must have actually touched the billet. So after the 'contacting' business I took the billet out of the room and, with the aid of a powerful objective, minutely scrutinised the paper. It appeared quite innocent of any markings.

But what I had seen started a certain train of thought. When I returned to the room, mixed the billets in the hat, and commenced burning them, my powers of observation were concentrated on *one* thing—the *colour* of the flame made by the burning billets. The burning of the second billet aroused my suspicions—was I mistaken, or did the flame really appear to be of a slightly greenish tinge? At this moment the medium shouted the usual 'Blow it out!' but I insisted upon burning it to the (I was now convinced) green and bitter end. 'Wonderful, isn't it?' said the man from Oshkosh, Wis. 'It is,' I replied, 'but not very. What do you carry it in—a sponge?'

At last he owned up. As I concluded, the faint tinge in the 'dead' billets was caused by sulphate of copper—better known as 'bluestone'. What happened was that in his pocket was a small sponge saturated with a weak solution of sulphate of copper and distilled water; it makes a pale blue liquid absolutely invisible, when dry, on a piece of unsized paper. Just previously to 'contacting' he touched the sponge with the tip of his finger,

which he cleverly inserted in my fist while holding it, and touched the billet. The mark was absolutely invisible, but there was enough of the metallic copper transferred to the paper to give the flame a very slight green tinge.

'Well, doc., is it worth fifty bucks to you?' It was not, but I gave him something that helped to shorten—slightly—the road between Kensington, South, and Oshkosh, Wis.

Another miracle-monger who called upon me was a Mr. E. M. Sturgess, and he declared that he could demonstrate the power of mind over matter by means of instruments, and invited me to test him. I consented. He duly arrived on the day appointed for the test, and I invited a number of scientists (including Professor Dr. Hans Driesch, the Leipzig philosopher, who happened to be in London) to witness the 'miracle'.

The man who possessed a mind that could dominate matter brought to my laboratory several pieces of apparatus, the chief of which was a disc of wood, eighteen inches in diameter, around the periphery of which were pasted about twenty ordinary playing-cards. The disc was mounted vertically, and in the centre was a spindle, attached to which was a long needle or pointer which moved freely on its pivot. The pointer could be spun round and, being very evenly balanced, it would stop at a card at random. The whole affair was like a large clock face, with playing-cards instead of figures.

The claim made was that the 'medium', by merely *thinking* of a certain card, could, without touching the apparatus in any way, mentally compel or 'will' the pointer to travel slowly round the dial and stop at the selected suit. Or an observer could suggest a card, and the medium would mentally cause the pointer to travel to the one selected. I am convinced that Mr. Sturgess genuinely thought he had some sort of abnormal power.

After having carefully examined and tested the machine



(which was really very simply constructed), I set it up in the centre of a heavy teak laboratory table around which sat the scientific observers, one of whom had chosen the King of Hearts. I told the medium to commence 'willing'.

The medium then placed one hand on the table. He told us all to think hard of the King of Hearts. We thought accordingly. With all eyes directed on the instrument we saw the pointer very slowly travel round the dial. It stopped at the King of Hearts. Then we chose another card, and again the needle gradually swung round and came to rest at the selected spot. By the time we had witnessed the second successful experiment, I had formulated a theory as to how the 'miracle' was worked. Why did the medium persist in keeping his hand on the edge of the table?

I suggested that we should be more impressed if the medium stood absolutely clear of the table without touching it in any way. 'That is impossible,' he said, 'because some of my animal magnetism has to travel through the table, and so into the machine. I *must* make contact.' I pointed out to him that if he stood quite clear of the table his 'magnetism' could still flow from him into his machine *via* his boots, the floor and the table-legs. He would not admit my point.

In order to demonstrate to the observers that the theory I had formed was correct, I proposed an experiment of my own. I procured a bowl of mercury and placed it on the table near the machine, and between it and the man who exuded animal magnetism. I then asked him to repeat the experiment with the cards. This he did, still keeping his hand on the edge of the table. But the secret was out! Over the surface of the quick-silver ran a succession of tiny ripples—the outward and visible sign that the table-top was vibrating rapidly, though invisibly. Without waiting for the medium to pick out the card we had chosen, I asked him to stand back and, taking his place, and with my feet planted firmly on the ground, I, too, placed my

hand on the table and had no difficulty in making the pointer travel—and stop—wherever I 'willed'.

The explanation of this 'miracle' is simple and any reader can try it. The needle was so delicately balanced that the slightest vibration would set it in motion—which was conveyed to it, *via* the table-top, by imperceptible movements of the man's hand pressed firmly on the table edge. By pressing hard, and with muscles taut, the slightest motion of the hand was conveyed to the machine in the centre of the table.

Our friend was surprised to find that I, too, was a 'medium', but he took it all in good part. I later constructed a machine on the same principle which was much more impressive. This had a very delicately-hung pendulum, pivoted on diamond mountings. A swing of even 1/250th part of an inch would close an electrical circuit which, through an electro-magnet and suitable gearing, would, with each impulse, send the pointer round one degree. At a distance of three feet the machine would function with the hand held fairly lightly on the edge of the table. I astonished some of my friends with this machine—until I told them the secret.

One of the most brazen spellbinders who have ever entered my office was a man who called himself 'Sandy Macpherson': he was a Jew from Houndsditch. He came to see me because, he said, he had some wonderful apparatus by means of which he could make himself invisible at will. I call him the 'Invisible Man'.

He said he wanted a large fee for a test, as it meant a van-load of 'properties' and a great deal of trouble to arrange his 'set-up'. We compromised by my agreeing to settle the carter's bill.

The day—and a small pantechicon—duly arrived for the test, and as the men carried in his impedimenta, I wondered if 'Sandy' had ever kept a draper's shop, as his sole apparatus con-

sisted of about a dozen tall pier glasses or mirrors such as are used in the dressmaking stores where ladies foregather in such large numbers.

Sandy shut himself up in my *séance*-room for half an hour and then called me in and said he was ready for the test. He now commenced 'hedging'; he said he could not make *himself* invisible, but could make his *reflection* invisible. On the principle of 'half a loaf', etc., I had to be content with the prospect of witnessing only a semi-miracle.

When I entered the *séance*-room (from which the daylight had been excluded), I found that all the tall mirrors had been stood vertically on their edges at one end of the apartment in a most curious formation, and at several different angles, roughly in the form of a semi-circle. In front of the looking-glasses was placed a chair. Sandy now asked me to switch off all the lights, count ten, and then switch them on again. This I did, and found that the spellbinder was sitting on the chair in front of the mirrors.

'Walk slowly up to the chair', said Sandy, 'and see if you can find my reflection.' I did as I was directed and must admit that for a fraction of a second I was genuinely startled. Although the end of the room farthest from the set-up was visible in every detail, the reflection of my Caledonian friend from Houndsditch appeared to be missing. The chair was also invisible, whereas normally, of course, both chair and man should have been reflected.

Although for a moment I was impressed at the result of the arrangement of the mirrors, my knowledge of the law of optics came to my rescue, and I quickly realised that what I saw before me was modelled on a well-known principle in conjuring which is often used in stage illusions. And I lost no time in telling Sandy what I thought of him and his 'psychic gift'. I went up to him, made him stand up, moved his chair six inches from the spot where he had so carefully placed it, told him to sit down again, stepped back a few paces—and I saw the

very unusual spectacle of half a man and half a chair reflected in the mirrors. A move of another six inches and both man and chair were fully reflected.

Well, they loaded up the van with a little less alacrity than when they unloaded it and, an hour later, when I was going to lunch, I saw Sandy and the van driver coming out of the local hostelry where, doubtless, they had been consoling each other with the fact that we live in a hard and incredulous world.

This story has a sequel. A few months after Sandy tried to 'put over' his mirror 'phenomenon', a toy, in which the same optical principle was employed, was put on the market. I was at once reminded of the illusion I had seen demonstrated in my *séance*-room. The toy was in the form of a box, closed on all sides, but partly open at the top. At one end of the box were a number of strips of looking-glass and, facing them, was a peep-hole. If a person put his eye to the peep-hole, he could see it plainly reflected in the mirrors opposite. Then, if a small object, such as a marble, were placed in the box and the observer again placed his eye to the peep-hole, he could still see the reflection of his own eye—but neither the marble nor the reflection of the marble were visible. So my friend had turned his magic mirrors to account, after all. It is wonderful how these 'Scotsmen' persevere!

One of the most amusing 'mediums' who ever visited my *séance*-room was Claude Bishop, better known as 'Dolores', who came all the way from Auckland, New Zealand, to show us what he could do. He arrived with a manager and a Press agent. 'Dolores' claimed to get spirit writing on slates in full light; to be able to float a person in mid-air; to produce in a pan of plastic clay, several feet away from him, the features of a person on the other side of the room; to read sealed messages (known as 'billet reading'), and similar marvels.

'Dolores' arrived at my office one afternoon to talk things

over. I had heard<sup>1</sup> a good deal about him before he ever set foot in this country, and, to convince him that we also knew a few tricks, I immediately read for him his own message (which I had not previously seen) that he put in a box which I supplied, and which he locked; and I showed him that I could thread an endless loop of cord on a jointless curtain ring: two tricks which thoroughly fooled him. After some discussion, I promised to test him, and the first *séance* was held on January 26, 1933. Terms: £5 per sitting.

Although we had heard so much about the miracles he performed in full light, in my *séance*-room he demanded Stygian blackness. 'Dolores' sat at the end of our *séance* table, with the back of his chair hard up against the curtains of the cabinet in which we had placed a dish of modelling clay, and the usual musical toys—for the spirits to amuse themselves with. On either side of 'Dolores' sat the two controllers, who each held one of his hands. Every few seconds each controller recorded the exact position of the medium's hands and feet. These observations were taken down in shorthand by the laboratory's secretary.

The above method of reporting a *séance* was necessary because we found that 'Dolores' was more of a contortionist than a medium. His arms were in constant motion, like the sails of a windmill. His feet were never in one spot for more than a few seconds, and were often on the controllers' knees. His head was sometimes on the table, sometimes stretched out behind him, almost in the cabinet. But the position of every part of his body was, second by second, recorded in our protocol. Controlling 'Dolores' is an excellent substitute for an hour's 'physical jerks'! Of course, nothing happened at this *séance*, but 'Carlo', his

<sup>1</sup>See: 'Dolores and His Magic Slates: Spirit Writing in Karangahape Road'; also, 'Spirit Medium in a Motor Smash. The Strange Premonition of Claud Dolores', two articles by Margaret Macpherson in the *New Zealand Observer and New Zealand Advertiser*, Auckland, N.Z., for April 21 and 7,

spirit guide, declared he would produce miracles at the next sitting. So we arranged another meeting for February 1.

For the second *séance* we used the same accessories as at the first sitting, including a dish of modelling clay, over the smoothed surface of which we painted a thin coating of a non-drying, indelible carmine dye. If the 'spirits' were willing, or were able, they could impress the clay and us at the same time; on the other hand, if 'Dolores' surreptitiously freed a hand and managed to mark the clay himself (it was only a few feet behind him), his hand would be deeply stained. The clay was *not* interfered with!

For our second test, the medium demanded a still blacker *séance*-room, if possible. We held the medium in the same way, Professor Dr. D. F. Fraser-Harris being one of the controllers, whom 'Carlo' frequently changed. The exact position of every part of 'Dolores'' body was recorded every few seconds. We waited patiently for nearly an hour, but no phenomena were witnessed.

Suddenly, we heard something drop on the table. 'Apport!' (*i.e.* any object supernormally brought into the *séance*-room) exclaimed someone. Instantly, 'Dolores' wrenched his arm from out of control and we heard that peculiar click which false teeth make when being replaced. The lights were turned up, but we could find nothing that had fallen. I then asked 'Dolores' whether he had false teeth, and he admitted that he had an upper denture with four teeth in it. Experimenting afterwards, I found that the noise we had heard was *exactly* like a denture being dropped. With hands controlled, I found that I could easily expel and replace an object in my mouth: no hands were needed. I charged 'Dolores' with having played this trick upon us. Nothing further happened, except that, at least twenty times, 'Carlo' told Dr. Fraser-Harris that he (Fraser-Harris) was a 'wonderful medium' and 'very powerful'!

And so 'Dolores', his manager and his Press agent faded

away, the sum total of the New Zealander's visit to our laboratory being that I paid him a cheque for £5 for one *séance* and showed him a couple of tricks which, I am sure, are puzzling him to this day.

Some 'mediums' are comic by accident, and one of my earliest experiences concerns a farcical affair I witnessed several years before the War, and which was entirely unpremeditated on the part of the principal actor.

In a Brighton paper I saw an advertisement to the effect that a medium was holding *séances* in a top back room at a house in Waterloo Street, Hove. Admission, one shilling. I duly found my way there one evening and was admitted to the medium's lodgings. It appeared that a man and his pretty daughter, Elsie, were trying to eke out a living with the help of the 'spirits'. There were about eight of us in the room, which had been carefully darkened to exclude all daylight. The medium was a man about sixty years of age, and hailed from the Midlands. His daughter was a slim girl of about twenty-three years.

Having arranged us round an oblong table, on which was a battered tin trumpet, in an apartment (which also did duty as a bedroom; I was sitting on an old hair trunk), the medium opened the proceedings by playing 'Abide With Me', 'Come, Thou Holy Spirit, Come' and 'There is a Better Land' on a wheezy accordion. We were asked to join in 'where we could'. Then we sang 'Three Blind Mice', and the girl was told to turn out the gas. I sat on the right of the medium.

In pitch darkness the man commenced to go into trance and in a falsetto voice informed us that 'Prairie Flower',<sup>1</sup> his spirit guide, would manifest. After a short pause, a child's voice an-

<sup>1</sup>The name 'Prairie Flower' was undoubtedly borrowed from the 'Great Sequah', whose quack doctors (dressed as Mohawk Indians) and gilded band-waggon were a familiar sight in England forty years ago. 'Sequah's Oil' and 'Prairie Flower' were two specifics guaranteed to cure every ailment under the sun.

nounced that 'Prairie Flower' was with us. The medium, removing the trumpet from his lips (I could hear or feel every movement of the man), then informed the sitters that he would ask 'Prairie Flower' to show us her 'pretty spirit lights'. This was said in his normal voice and, again with the trumpet to his mouth, the spirit promised she would. Then, in a pretty little speech, 'Prairie Flower' told us all about the 'Summerland', and how nice it was to be there.

I ought to point out that the sitters were not holding hands and there was no control of the medium. In a minute or so, I heard a shuffling by my side, where the medium was sitting, and I was astonished to see, high up above me, a round luminous patch that looked like the full moon in a cloudless sky. Murmurs of delight from the devotees. Then came a most unspiritual exclamation from the medium, accompanied by a shriek from his daughter. The 'moon' became suddenly eclipsed; there was a hasty opening of doors and we sat there wondering what had happened.

After a minute or so I suggested lighting the gas. This was done, and someone went in search of the daughter who, upon returning to the *séance*-room, said that her father was ill. The sitters departed, but I remained behind to make a few inquiries. I told the girl that the 'moon' I had seen reeked of rat poison and said I was astonished at her being a party to such an obvious swindle.

Elsie did not attempt to deny the fact that that part of the *séance* was a fake, and explained the cause of its sudden cessation. It appears that the man had in his hip pocket a flask of phosphorised oil which, when exposed to the air, shone with a pale, ethereal light. During his exertions with the accordion, the flask broke against the back of his chair, and the contents saturated the seat of his trousers. When he stood on the chair to produce 'Prairie Flower's' spirit lights, he felt for the bottle and found what had happened. Elsie's shriek informed him that the



spirit lights were in the wrong place! Hence the sudden stampede.

The last time I heard of the man was through his advertisement in a psychic paper, and apparently he had turned into a 'healing medium'. He also offered to develop your psychic faculties by post. When I saw his notice, I was sorely tempted to write and remind him of the 'phosphorised moon' which had so rudely interrupted 'Prairie Flower's' platitudes from the 'spirit world'.

I could give many further examples of curious claims to mediumship which I have investigated: of the woman who tried to levitate herself; of the midwife who was 'controlled' by the spirit of Homer, and reeled off verses which might have originated in a box of Christmas crackers; of the Chelsea artist who found that he was painting 'spiritual' subjects, and 'didn't know how he did it', etc., etc. But I have said enough to indicate the vast amount of psychic chaff which I have to wade through before I discover a single grain worthy of serious attention. But even pseudo-mediumship has a certain educational value.

### VIII. From Kensington to the Planet Mars

Many people, including scientists of note, have dreamed of inter-planetary communication. Some have invented machines; others have used the radio; and spiritualist mediums have claimed to contact with the inhabitants of other planets. Mars, especially, on account of the belief that life on this planet is theoretically possible, has received considerable attention from scientists and others, and from the mediums.

Mars is the fourth planet in order of distance from the sun. At an opposition near perihelion it is about 35 million miles distant; at an opposition near aphelion it is about 63 million miles from the sun. The atmosphere on Mars is thought to be of a density less than a quarter that of the earth, with a mean temperature of 48° Fahrenheit, never rising to more than 65° or 70° Fahrenheit. And it must be very cold sometimes. A snow cap is visible at certain periods, and this is thought due to the precipitation of water vapour in the form of ice, or frozen carbonic acid. As the Mars summer approaches, the 'cap' gradually melts. It is not thought possible that human beings like ourselves could exist on the planet, though it is probable that vegetable life is to be found there—and even some form of animal life, adapted to the special conditions, may find a home on Mars.

The very little we really know concerning Mars has not deterred mediums from asserting that the planet is inhabited, and various descriptions of Martian life, people, scenery, language, etc., have been recorded at *séances*. The great 'Mars' medium was 'Hélène Smith' (i.e. Catherine Élise Muller) who was investigated by Professor Théodore Flournoy, and the his-

tory of this extraordinary mediumship is to be found in his *From India to the Planet Mars*.<sup>1</sup> In the trance state, Héléne described a country she called Mars, with people very like ourselves. She also spoke a 'Martian' language (which was found to be based on French). In summing up the mediumship, Professor Flournoy says he was struck by 'the complete identity of the Martian world . . . with the world in which we live. . . . All the traits that I discover in the author of the Martian romance can be summed up in a single phrase, its profoundly infantile character.'

At least three 'Martian' mediums have passed through my hands at various times. The first was a man who brought with him a huge machine, which I will attempt to describe. On six insulating porcelain castors was erected a circular copper platform. On the platform were twelve stone jars such as are used for storage batteries. In each jar was a stick of carbon, attached to which was a brass terminal. From the centre of the lower platform an ebonite pillar supported a round sheet of plate glass, which covered, and almost touched, the twelve jars. On this glass upper platform was a ten by eight-inch porcelain photographic developing dish. In the dish were two plates of metal (one of zinc and one of copper), each with six terminals. At the other end of each plate was another terminal. As he carried this curious apparatus from the taxi to my *séance*-room, it looked exactly like a large edition of one of those display stands, complete with jars, that one sees in a grocer's window.

In addition to the stand, the medium brought with him twelve bottles, each containing a liquid. The liquids were of various colours. I asked him what they were composed of. 'I dare not tell you', he said. 'That is one of the Three Great

<sup>1</sup>See: *Des Indes à la Planète Mars. Étude sur un Cas de Somnambulisme avec Glossolalie*, by Théodore Flournoy, London and Geneva, 1900; also the English translation, *From India to the Planet Mars*, New York and London, 1900. Also the same author's *Nouvelles Observations sur un Cas de Somnambulisme*, Geneva, 1902.

Secrets revealed to me by Alimarchite, the King of the Passes in Mars.' I did not press him to tell me what the liquids were, but they reminded me of the glass jars of coloured water seen in chemists' windows.

Having removed his belongings from the taxi, I helped him to carry them into the *séance*-room and sort them out. He filled the stone jars with the liquids, and I noticed that each jar was numbered, and the bottles bore corresponding numbers. To the terminals of the carbons in the jars he fastened wires, the other ends of which were attached to the metal plates in the dish. To the seventh (end) terminal of each metal plate an insulated cable was clipped. Two thin copper discs, about the size of tea plates, were soldered to the other ends of the cables.

When the 'Mars machine' was set up, he asked me for a jug of warm distilled water. Into the water he dropped about four ounces of white crystals which looked like salammoniac. When they had dissolved he emptied the contents of the jug into the porcelain dish.

Mr. X said he was now ready, removed his collar and tie, undid the buttons of his shirt and placed one copper disc on his chest; the other he slipped down his back. He explained that his instrument was now reproducing in him the exact elements of which Mars is composed. 'I am now *part* of Mars, and in a few minutes the mental portion of me will leave my body, travel to the planet, and I shall become a Martian.' With that remark, he sat on a chair beside the apparatus, stretched out his legs, threw back his head, closed his eyes, and in about five minutes he appeared to be asleep.

I sat down on the settee and watched him. He was breathing heavily, and his hands were twitching. I noticed little bubbles forming on the metal plates in the developing dish, and wondered whether he was receiving a mild electric shock. Suddenly he jumped up, threw up his arms, and for ten minutes gave an impassioned speech in some language I did not recognise. It was

like listening to a Hyde Park orator talking gibberish. The only word I could understand was 'Alimarchite', to whom, apparently, he was addressing some sort of prayer. He gesticulated, he moaned, he writhed. His eyes filled with tears. Suddenly he knelt down, at the same time dragging the metal plates out of the dish. Then more words in a supplicating tone of voice, followed by a complete collapse on the floor, finished this most extraordinary *séance*. After about five minutes, he became almost normal, picked himself up, sat on the chair, and in rather a weak voice said, 'I feel faint, can I have some water?' In a quarter of an hour he was quite normal again.

While he was putting on his collar and tie he told me his experiences during the 'astral excursion' (as he termed it) he had made from my *séance*-room in Kensington. He informed me that the instrument he made had the effect of hypnotising him and at once he became *en rapport* with the Martians. His spiritual body travelled to the planet and he mingled freely with the people who dwelt there. The language he spoke was that used by the inhabitants of our own planet when conversing with the Martians, though the latter, he informed me, do not use a language (as we recognise the term) at all. In his normal state he could not speak the 'language' I had heard, and did not remember what had happened to him in trance.

The most interesting part of this *séance* was Mr. X's description of Mars and its inhabitants. I plied him with many questions, and the following is a summary of the 'information' I received. From a psychological point of view his story is valuable:

The Martians are like huge *amœbæ*, erect, semi-transparent, and their method of locomotion is by rolling sideways. They have no eyes, but can 'see' by means of a membrane which covers them. In shape they resemble a nest of cups or bells, stacked vertically. They are unisexual, and multiply by fission. The lowest section, on which they support themselves,

gradually becomes thinner at the top where it joins the next 'bell'. Owing to the weight of the creature, the bottom section finally breaks off and becomes another small Martian, at the same time as the parent grows a new head or uppermost 'bell'. In other words, the under part of a Martian is always becoming detached, while the 'head' is continually reproducing itself. The creatures are small, not more than about four feet in height, and, apparently, live for ever. Each weighs about eighty pounds. They do not eat, but absorb nourishment from the atmosphere by ingestion. They have no homes, live in the open, and are continually moving round the planet, according to the season.

Martians feel the cold, and the atmosphere is very rarified. Mr. X informed me that the planet is a semi-fluid mass, one side of which is covered with a thin crust of a hard mineral, rather like ironstone. This crust is much heavier and thicker on the other side of the planet. It is this 'heavy' side which always faces the sun and receives its light and heat; consequently, the Martians crowd on this side, as they must have warmth. On the other side of the planet is always snow, in which they shrivel up. No Martian has ever seen the snow cap which is visible from the earth, and the polar regions are unknown to them.

The sunny side of Mars is covered with low mountains and vast plains. A reddish-brown iron dust is everywhere. Certain large patches of the plains are covered with a leathery, brownish-green vegetation, with leaves like the Alpine *Edelweiss*. There are no other flora. For fauna, there are small, brown, leathery animals, about the size of rabbits, which roll over and over the vegetation without ceasing, and from which they absorb food. They multiply by fission. Their bodies gradually lengthen and they become thin in the centre. Finally, they break into two perfect animals, and the life cycle is repeated. There are no birds, but a bat-like creature lives amongst the vegetation and can hop a few inches into the air.

Apparently, the Martians cannot travel long distances. The crust on which they dwell is always sliding over the fluid core of the planet, but the inhabitants never move far from where they originated. They have no power of speech, but if two Martians make contact with each other, each knows the other's thoughts and wishes. 'They are very intelligent,' said Mr. X, 'but theirs is a simple, natural intelligence and they are born with it.' They have leaders among them. There is our friend 'Almarchite', the King of the Passes; there is a lord of the mountains, king of the animals, etc., with an Emperor of the Snows who is the supreme head of all the Martians. I asked X about the famous 'canals', but he said, 'I have never seen them'.

Of course, all this Martian nonsense sounds rather silly, but as a phase of 'mediumship' it is interesting to the psychist and psychologist. I asked Mr. X whether he had ever read Wells's *The War of the Worlds*,<sup>1</sup> but he said he had not. The last time I heard from Mr. X was about two years after our curious *séance*. He wrote from a private mental asylum in Belfast, and asked me to procure for him a rare mineral, of which I had never heard. With the letter was a short note from the doctor in charge of the asylum, who asked me to write something to his patient in order to humour him. This I did, but I never heard from the 'medium' again.

My second experience with a 'Mars medium' was rather amusing. A woman came to see me and said that, once a month, at certain phases of the moon, she had 'periods' during which, in the entranced state, she could communicate with Mars. Would I test her? I said I would. She produced a small diary from her handbag, and a large planisphere which she had in a parcel, and, after five minutes' calculations with pencil and paper, told me that the next 'period' would fall on the follow-

<sup>1</sup>London, 1898. The novel deals with an attack on the earth by Martians, and their defeat.

ing Wednesday week at 10.30 in the morning. I said I would expect her on the date mentioned.

Punctually to the minute, Mrs. Z put in an appearance. She asked to be allowed to change her clothes in the *séance*-room. It appeared that she had to don a 'Mars costume', which was nothing more than a bathing dress, on which had been embroidered the signs of the zodiac in white silk. These were dotted about the front of her, the back of her dress bearing the familiar constellation of Orion, with a few odd stars here and there. I asked her whether she had done the embroidery herself, and she said, 'Yes, but under guidance'. Wearing nothing except the astrological bathing dress, and a pair of white shoes, she looked strangely out of place in our *séance*-room. She informed me that it was imperative that she had a rest before the *séance* and asked permission to lie on the couch. She said she would be ready in about half an hour. It was then about eleven o'clock.

About twelve o'clock, hearing snores from the *séance*-room, I peeped in and saw Madame Z stretched out on the settee, fast asleep. I had a good mind to awaken her, but thought I might be breaking some 'condition' if she were prematurely disturbed, so refrained from interfering. At one o'clock she was still asleep, and I went out to lunch, leaving the front door unlocked in case she awoke and wished to go home. I returned at 2.15 and found her still snoring. At 3.30 I was really concerned as to what I should do. Was she merely asleep, or in a deep hypnotic trance? I decided to test her. In the *séance*-room (which is also where my collection of books is kept) was a pair of library-steps. I arranged these against the door so that when the latter was opened the steps would crash to the ground. I returned to my office. Ten minutes later I sent my secretary into the *séance*-room to see how the medium was getting on. Knowing nothing about the steps, she pushed open the door—and the steps crashed to the ground. I do not know who was the more astonished, my secretary or the medium. Madame Z jumped up



with a cry of alarm, thinking perhaps the Martians were attacking her. She was astonished that she had been asleep all day and excused herself on the plea that she had had a late night. She said it was impossible to hold the *séance* as it had to take place in the morning. She informed me that the next 'period' would be in a month's time, and that she would communicate with me again. But she did not keep her word, and I have not seen her since. I often think of the zodiacal bathing suit and the 'Martian' sleep on our too comfortable settee.

My third attempt at testing a 'Martian medium' was made also through a woman, and was the most successful, inasmuch as we did obtain something concrete in the shape of 'Martian' writing, drawing, and a dictaphone record of a 'Martian love song'.

On February 2, 1926, I had a letter from Mr. H. Mansfield Robinson, a doctor of laws and a well-known solicitor. He informed me that he was interested in Mars and the Martians and had patented an instrument called the Psychomotormeter, by means of which he had 'succeeded in getting in touch with Martians both by the above instrument and by obtaining their natural voices speaking in the Martian language through a floating trumpet and through a medium in semi-trance'. He told me that he would like to demonstrate these voices to me, if I would endeavour to record them on a dictaphone. He also asked me to photograph the 'accompanying phantom' by ultra-violet light. I replied that I would like to experiment with him and his medium, who was a Mrs. St. John James. A few days later he wrote me, and fixed a date for the first test. He said that Mrs. James was an automatic writer and it was through her pencil that she discovered that she was in touch with Mars.

It appeared that Dr. Robinson himself was psychic and was able to contact with the Martians. In a letter dated February 12, 1926, he told me that he had arranged telepathically with a Martian lady named Oomaruru to be present at the tests. 'She is

very pleased at the idea of being treated with scientific seriousness, and I hope to get Pawleenoos, also a very cultured giant, but he was too busy this morning in Mars to attend my call.' A test sitting was finally arranged for March 9, 1926.

A few days before the sitting Dr. Robinson sent me the following programme. It had been arranged by himself, telepathically, with some of the chief inhabitants of Mars. He stated that Mrs. James knew nothing of the programme:

1. Oomaruru, female Martian, to speak short poem of her own composition into dictaphone and then write down same in Martian language.
2. Martian princess to speak into dictaphone and write down some message in Martian.
3. Pawleenoos, male Martian, to speak love song into dictaphone, and then sing same and write it down through the hand of Mrs. James.
4. Martian savage bushman to speak Martian and write it down—all through Mrs. St. John James, sensitive.

(Signed) H. MANSFIELD ROBINSON.

I invited a few people to the Martian *séance* and installed two dictaphones. The sitting was held at 2.30 in the afternoon, in full light. Dr. Robinson, accompanied by Mrs. James, arrived just after two o'clock and pronounced our arrangements satisfactory. We sat round a table, Mrs. James facing the light. In front of the medium were placed a foolscap sketch-book and the dictaphones. Pencil in hand, she gazed at the ceiling, sighed deeply, looked vacantly at the circle of sitters, and gave a spasmodic jerk in her chair: Dr. Robinson said she was entranced.

The medium's countenance suddenly changed. Her face became animated and her eyes sparkled. Striking the table with her hand, she uttered a few words in a strange tongue, and commenced making a series of curious marks in the sketch-book. Dr. Robinson said that Mrs. James was controlled by Oomaruru, 'the woman in green', who had kindly written down the



complete Martian alphabet for us. Oomaruru signed her name and wrote 'Thank you!' in the Martian language. Then Pawleenoos, the 'cultured giant', drew his portrait in the sketch-



Head of Pawleenoos, 'cultured Martian giant'



'Symphonic chant' of the Martians

book—of course, through the hand of the medium. The next part of the programme consisted of Oomaruru speaking the Martian alphabet into the dictaphone, which was followed by

the 'Martian princess' crooning a love song, which was also recorded on the wax cylinder. If the song was not Martian, it was certainly 'unearthly', and sounded rather like a solo by a crowing cock. There was nothing musical about it. I still possess the records.

The 'Martian princess' then proceeded to give us a message. Fortunately this was in the English language and not in Martian hieroglyphics. Mrs. James wrote rapidly, in a sprawling hand, and some of the words are undecipherable. But here is part of the 'message', as far as I can make it out: 'O Love Divine and beautiful I am all you want: It is a holy thing; Come wise and holy I come my love to thee and win — my — answer — sweet love I take thee but wait till the dawn of Peace . . .,' etc. There is much more in the same strain, but it is almost unreadable. It will be noticed that there is nothing transcendental in the 'message', and apparently love-sick Martian princesses are just as sentimental as our own girls.

After the 'princess' had done her best, Oomaruru wrote her 'own love poem'—at least, that is what Dr. Robinson has marked it in the sketch-book. It is in the 'Martian language', which consists merely of a number of symbols intermixed with what are undoubtedly Roman capitals. Finally, another Martian, perhaps the 'savage bushman', wrote the 'symphonic chant' of the Martians. It is highly picturesque and a little reminiscent of our own musical notation. That was the end of my experiments with Mrs. St. John James. Dr. Robinson continued to sit with her, though I think he afterwards attempted to communicate with Mars by means of long-wave radio. I am afraid that mediums have told me very little about Mars and the Martians. I agree with Professor Flournoy that all we have heard is 'profoundly infantile'.

Another attempt to signal to Mars by radio was described in the Press<sup>1</sup> on November 3, 1932. We read of 'a group of scien-

<sup>1</sup>See 'Scientists Plan a Signal Station to Call Mars', in the *Daily Express* for Nov. 3, 1932.

tifically-minded men' meeting weekly in London, and of a medium 'for whom it is claimed that a spirit control is in mind-communication with the men on Mars'. The name of the medium was not mentioned, but I strongly suspect that it was Mrs. St. John James. Plans were made for erecting wireless stations in the arctic circle (where the alleged radio messages from Mars were received) but I have heard nothing of the scheme for years.

Unfortunately, some attempts at communicating with Mars are very costly. In 1929 I was approached by a group of investigators (including a distinguished professor of engineering) who wished me to undertake some research work as to the possibility of communicating with Mars by means of a powerful beam of light. I spent a considerable amount of time and money in testing the possibilities of the scheme, which I perfected—on paper. But I am still waiting for the £14,000 which the scheme would cost.

We first considered the burning of metal magnesium in oxygen in order to produce an intense light, but could not devise any practicable method of concentrating the illuminant into a beam which would give an enormous range in any one direction. Then I approached Messrs. Chance Brothers & Co., Ltd., the famous lighthouse engineers, of Smethwick, Birmingham, who immediately interested themselves in the scheme and went to considerable trouble in computing a formula which would give us a beam of light of an intensity previously unheard of. In a letter to me dated December 14, 1929, they state: 'We are now putting a proposition before you which will give a beam of light far and away more powerful than anything that has hitherto been done and giving a total calculated candle power of practically 15,000 million.' The apparatus they suggested consisted of three of their largest lighthouse lenses of the first order, in conjunction with a special high intensity arc lamp with means for adjusting the three beams

so that they formed one main beam in the direction desired. The lenses consisted of 'First Order Holophotal', 920 mm. focal distance, with a 'Sperry' high intensity electric arc lamp. The three units were to be mounted on one cast-iron base plate or pedestal, each unit resting on eight supporting stools or standards, with mechanical tilting by three screw jacks. Detailed blue prints of the complete set-up accompanied the specification. The cost of the optical equipment was estimated at £9500, including an automatic Morse transmitter for sending signals.

The suggested site for the experiments was near the observatory on the Jungfrauoch, in the Bernese Oberland, 11,340 feet above sea-level. I surveyed the site in the summer of 1929 and found it eminently suitable. I arranged with the company owning the rack-and-pinion railway up the Jungfrau for a supply of electricity from their turbine power-works at Lauterbrunnen. The railway would be particularly useful for the transportation of our apparatus.

It soon leaked out why I was on the Jungfrau and the Continental Press took a keen interest in the project. One Swiss paper seriously suggested that such an intense light on the Jungfrau would blind half Europe. This is rubbish, of course. Our chief concern was whether, assuming there are sentient beings on Mars, the beam would be seen by them. The opinions of scientists differ on this point. The project is all ready to be launched and I am now awaiting some rich, philanthropic amateur scientist to put up the money in order that we can make the test.

## IX. *The Strange Case of Madame X*

The first case which came before the notice of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research (which I founded in 1925, and of which I was director) in its official and corporate capacity presents many points of interest which are not usually associated with the practice of mediumship.

Madame X is a cultured English lady who has spent many years in the south of France, where at one time she acted as correspondent for a well-known London journal. She is *petite*, lithe and active, has bobbed hair, and was forty-six years of age when she asked me to investigate her claims. She has been interested in the scientific side of psychical research nearly all her life.

In March 1924 Madame X discovered that she had the gift of automatic writing. The discovery was made in a curious way. When putting down items in her market book, she found that extraneous words and messages were being intermingled with the list of her household requirements. She cultivated this gift of writing and secured innumerable 'messages'. She likewise received messages from an alleged spirit control who stated that he was 'Arthur Russell, a noted gymnast in the earth life'. Then another control, who called himself 'Gerald', claimed to be helping her. 'Gerald' said that in earth life he was a famous virtuoso and excelled in music and drawing.

The automatic writing was accompanied eventually by automatic drawing, and at various times Madame X has executed a large number of pastels which, at first glance, appear to be merely meaningless scrolls and figures; but it is alleged that there is some hidden meaning in them, and the psychic asserts



that she is able to interpret them. To the writer, the 'pictures' are quite meaningless. Madame X had never previously drawn anything and she appeared to imagine that the designs drawn by her, under the controlling influence of 'Gerald', were masterpieces.

From drawing to music is but a short step, and one day the psychic found that, when under the control of 'Gerald', she became a brilliant pianist with a wonderful technique. In her normal state she could play only moderately well. Her voice, too, became like that of a trained singer; whereas, ordinarily, she could not sing at all. The Council of the Laboratory had no opportunity of testing these statements.

Though normally able to swim a little, the psychic found that when controlled by the gymnast, 'Arthur Russell', she could disport herself in the water like a professional giving an exhibition display. Again, we have only her word for this.

As time went on, the psychic found that the artistic 'Gerald' gradually gave way to the muscular 'Arthur Russell', who appeared to take almost complete possession of her, compelling her to do daily gymnastic exercises of several hours' duration. It is fortunate for her that she is slim, lithe, and wiry, and weighs about eight stone; it would have been disastrous for the psychic if she had been corpulent. She states that she put up some sort of fight against 'Arthur Russell's' domination. In the early stages, it was once three hours before the control could even raise her arm. But her resistance gradually broke down, and she danced and wrestled, and fought and struggled (with invisible beings), apparently at the whim of the control. Another alleged entity now made its appearance, and the psychic, who said that she could plainly see it clairvoyantly, stated that it had a goose's head and a dragon's tail.

It was about this period that Madame X decided to have her mediumship tested scientifically, and proceeded to Paris for that purpose. I understand that she arrived late in July or early

in August—at any rate during the vacation, when the French psychists were away. She then came to London and placed her services at the disposal of the National Laboratory. I had a long interview with the psychic, who gave me the particulars recorded above. We arranged for a sitting on August 13, 1925. Two days before the *séance* I received the following letter from the psychic:

'LONDON, 11/8/1925.

DEAR MR. PRICE,

Shall I mention one or two things which may help? I shall need as strong a light as possible, unshaded electric. . . . Please do not get alarmed if I look in trouble (in case of levitation, very gymnastic), and do not touch me on any account, even if I fall. I cry sometimes and even seem to want to vomit, but it's nothing important, as you will soon see. I find that talking and movement by the sitters take away [the alleged 'power'] and may stop me entirely. On the other hand, intense concentration is not necessary. The Unseen Operators often work up to something while I am lying at my ease and wondering whether to buy white or gray stockings, or remembering that to-morrow I must pay the milk bill. After the sitting, please let me rest for a few minutes and then I will answer questions. . . . It is no use talking to me during the sittings: I can't answer. In later sittings, if we have any, you may find telepathic suggestions complied with if practicable.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) "X".'

The psychic also informed us that she wanted a thick carpet on the floor and the room cleared of all furniture. We procured the brightest lights we could get, though the ideal conditions for her display are brilliant sunlight and the open seashore. She works better in a bathing costume.

Madame X arrived to time on the appointed day, but would not shake hands with us as 'the power would be dissipated'.

Those of the council present at this sitting were a Dr. Z., Lieutenant-Colonel W. W. Hardwick and myself. The *séance* commenced at eleven o'clock and lasted about an hour and a half.

The psychic arrived at the *séance* attired in a pair of black close-fitting knickers, a white knitted 'jumper', black stockings and dancing shoes—an excellent costume for the display which followed. She inspected the carpet, which she pronounced satisfactory. The floor-covering is an important point in her performance. 'Arthur Russell' is frequently violent and throws the psychic all over the room. Once 'Arthur Russell' threw her out of bed. The psychic fell on her head and did not move for a considerable time. It is important, then, that Madame X has something soft to fall on when being controlled by 'Arthur'. Having pronounced our arrangements satisfactory, the psychic removed her false teeth and the *séance* commenced. The following account is taken from the notes I made during the sitting.

Madame X stood in the middle of the room, rubbing her hands and staring vacantly at various parts of the wall, ceiling, etc. Suddenly, as if lashed by a whip, she spun round and round on one foot and fell to the ground, where she remained, muttering. She rose and made sucking noises with her mouth. The sucking noises gave place to a peculiar sound—very like a whistle—caused by the rapid intake of breath with the lips almost closed. She then laughed and groaned alternately, at last falling into an excited and emotional state bordering on ecstasy. The ecstatic period passed, and she stood on one leg, as still as a statue, in an attitude of supplication. Suddenly she shrank away from some thing or person which, it is alleged, she saw clairvoyantly, and shouted 'Oh! no!' in apparent alarm. She again fell to the floor, where she went through the pantomime of swimming. She rose, posed in different attitudes, suddenly fell again and twisted her arms and legs like a professional contortionist. Then she became as still as a statue again; then curi-

ous movements of her mouth, as if chewing something. Then she crossed over to me, took the pencil I was using for note-taking, and with it drew imaginary objects in the air. Pencil fell to floor, and she twirled round and round like an acrobat, with occasional tumbles on to the floor. Then the psychic commenced dancing round the room; a peculiar dance, reminiscent of the Pentecostal Dancers or the Shakers. At 12.25 she picked up a piece of blank paper off my lap, stared at it intently, dropped it, rubbed her hands, opened the window, and threw some invisible object into the garden. The *séance* was over.

The psychic did not appear particularly tired after her very strenuous exhibition, and seemed quite refreshed after a little wine. It was an extraordinary display for a woman nearly forty-seven years of age. The case presented several unusual features, but it was difficult to decide whether the manifestations were due to a psychical or pathological disturbance. I rather favoured the latter hypothesis though certain aspects of the case were consistent with a state of partial dissociation of personality caused by self-induced hypnosis. Madame X appeared absolutely normal when not under control. A third hypothesis is that the 'phenomena' were the outcome of that particular form of ecstasy which in psychophysics is recognised as pathological to the extent that the mind of the subject is absorbed by a dominant idea. In the case of Madame X, it was the considered opinion of the medical members of the council that the psychic could induce at will a semi-hysterical state when she then supposed herself to be controlled by 'Gerald' and 'Arthur Russell'. We decided to have one more sitting. The second *séance* was held on August 20, 1925, the sitters including several members of our council. The time and duration of the *séance* were the same as for the previous sitting.

The psychic was dressed as previously, but just before the sitting commenced she complained that the room was stuffy, and that she wanted a lot of fresh air. Then she sat near the

window for some minutes. Then she stood in the centre of the room and stared at the wall for half a minute. I will now give my verbatim notes—taken as the *séance* proceeded—which will convey to the reader an exact idea of what happened during this curious sitting:

'Psychic sat on table; got up, and spun round like a peg-top. Psychic sat on the floor. Psychic rolled on floor and remained motionless. Then (nearly) head over heels. Then head over heels and remained on her head for some minute and a half. Psychic makes sucking noise, with slight foaming of the mouth. Psychic cries out and struggles with an invisible something or somebody. Talking and muttering to herself. Spins round and round. An involuntary "Oh!" as if hurt. Psychic commences to whistle and hum; commences to dance and cry. (Psychic apparently exhausted, and rests a little, leaning on table.) Psychic throws herself on floor and tries to "levitate". Holds up an invisible object and appears to measure something under the table. Slaps herself violently. Knocks her head on the table. Rises, and is immediately thrown to floor again as if by her "control". Psychic laughs and mutters some words. Spins round upon the posterior portion of her body, her foot catching my knee. Psychic has a terrific struggle with an invisible object, and remains flat on floor exhausted and motionless. Sucking sound. Half rises, knees and head on floor. Again tries to levitate herself. Sucking noise. Pretended to be lame and laughed. Jumped on table and then off again. Psychic is thrown to the floor. Commences to cry and calls out. Curles herself up on floor and spins round again. Rises. Lies flat on table and roars with laughter. Is thrown to ground. Strikes her chest violently and claps her hands. Rises. Puts her head out of open window, as if she wants air. Psychic hisses out the word "finished", takes an invisible object from her mouth and throws it out of window. Psychic apparently quite normal again.'

By the time Madame X had finished her extraordinary per-

formance, Dr. Z, our medical adviser, was convinced it was a most interesting case of self-induced hysteria, and presented the council with the following medical report:

'As a member of the Council of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, I have had, on two occasions, the opportunity of sitting with Madame X in order that I might witness the manifestations which occurred at her *séances*. It was her desire, I was informed, that the manifestations should be examined with the view to developing her alleged mediumistic faculties if it was found she possessed any psychic power.

'The activities presented consisted of posturing and ungraceful contortion of the whole figure, often in a supine or prone position. There was no loss of consciousness, and obvious care was taken not to suffer bruises or knocks in her tumbling. The eyes were open and the pupils not dilated at any time and the rhythm of the breathing remained always undisturbed. The conclusion I came to was that the lady was hysterical, and the manifestations purely hysterical. There appeared no evidence of any secondary personality and certainly no reason to suppose that the contortions, etc., were in any way due to a "control" or external intelligence. All the manifestations seemed purposeless and without meaning.'

The remainder of the council agreed with Dr. Z that it would be unwise to continue the sittings with Madame X, whose manifestations were thought due to pathological causes, though there was little trace of abnormality during the periods when she was not under the alleged control of 'Gerald' and 'Arthur Russell'.

After our experiments, Madame X sent me a number of paintings and drawings<sup>1</sup> which, it was alleged, had been executed automatically in the trance state. I could not contradict

<sup>1</sup>See *The Listener* for July 3, 1935, p. 13, where one of Madame X's trance drawings is reproduced.

her, but I could make nothing at all of the designs, which were supposed to be extremely symbolical and highly imaginative. Because I am neither art critic nor æstheticist is, perhaps, the reason why I failed to appreciate them.

During my first Scandinavian lecture tour in 1925 two cases similar to that of Madame X were brought to my notice. I assisted in opening an 'exhibition of objects of psychic interest' organised by the Copenhagen *Psykisk Oplysningsforening*. Amongst the exhibits were trance drawings executed by two 'mediums' when in the exalted or ecstatic state. Both cases were of extreme interest, but for different reasons. The name of one of the ecstasies was Josef Kotzian, of Priroz, Czechoslovakia, who produces automatically most wonderful drawings<sup>1</sup> of conventional flowers. He uses a lead pencil only, and his work is indescribably beautiful. In his normal state, I was informed, Herr Kotzian cannot draw at all.

The second ecstatic (in this case an hysteric) was a woman, whose name was not revealed. She suffered from a mental derangement, and her hysterical insanity was characterised by sudden and uncontrollable changes of emotion. During these periods she sometimes fell into a trance and commenced drawing<sup>2</sup>—though she had never been taught this subject in her life. She uses the right and left hands alternately in her work. Like Madame X, Frau ——— cannot draw at all unless she is in an ecstatic condition.

The subsequent history of Madame X is interesting. Having refused her further facilities to disport herself in our laboratory, she returned to France (where she resided) and tried to induce the Parisian scientists to investigate her claims. She was not successful. Then she started a small journal devoted to psychic and related subjects. I do not think the paper was a success.

<sup>1</sup>See *The Listener* for July 3, 1935, p. 13, where one of Madame X's trance drawings is reproduced.

Finally, she wrote her autobiography and sent me a copy in manuscript (it has never been published). She compiled an extraordinary—and quite interesting—story, which is a valuable document as throwing considerable light on the psychology of pseudo-mediumship. It has an honoured place in our collection of literary curiosities.



## X. How to Test a Medium

If I were asked to give, in a few words, some sound advice to a prospective investigator of psychic phenomena, I would say: 'Believe nothing you see or hear at a *séance*.' I agree that this *dictum* is rather sweeping, but it is intended principally for those bereaved ones whose grief drives them into the medium's parlour; and for the inexperienced, credulous and emotional type of person most likely to be attracted towards spiritualism. As these *Confessions* prove, inexplicable things *do* happen at *séances* and elsewhere, but it is only after long experience, an extensive training in the technique of testing a medium, and a thorough knowledge of the art of mystification, that one can discriminate between truth and falsehood, illusion and reality.

Unless one embarks on a scientific investigation of a certain medium or type of alleged phenomena, it is best to leave psychic matters severely alone. It is futile to 'dabble' in psychical research. I know many persons who have spent a small fortune in going the usual round of the mediums, and, at the finish, wished they had kept their money in their pocket. Lack of any evidence for a future life resulted in disappointment, and they became disgusted with the whole business. Even as an entertainment, phenomena-hunting is poor sport, and one can amuse oneself much better and more cheaply in many other ways. To the initiated, the typical sitting is a boring affair. It is true that, now and then, one comes across something that impresses one and is thought worthy of further investigation; but *séances* staged by professional mediums are often extremely tedious, and usually quite unconvincing. Occasionally, the 'psychic' charlatans provide us with a novelty in the way of

'phenomena', but unless one is professionally interested in investigating fraudulent mediums, it is best to keep clear of them: one can see better conjuring tricks on the stage. Those who are not well balanced mentally, or are emotional, should shun them like the plague. The unstable type of sitter is invariably credulous, knows nothing whatever about deceptive methods, and is easily deceived.

From the above remarks it may be thought that there are no mediums (this is a ridiculous and misleading term, but I am compelled to use it) worthy of investigation. Good mediums do exist, but they are so few and far between that the casual inquirer is not likely to come across them. And as I am certain that, in spite of my rather mild warning, some readers of these *Confessions* will still wish to visit those psychics who make a living out of 'mediumship', I will suggest some simple precautions which should be taken when testing a medium. But, before I give these few rules (which have been based on long experience in solving the mysteries of the *séance*-room), I will indicate briefly the types of phenomena likely to be investigated. These may conveniently be divided into three classes: (a) abnormal mental phenomena; (b) abnormal physical phenomena; (c) miscellaneous phenomena.

Mental phenomena include *automatism*, the act of doing something (such as 'automatic' writing, painting, etc.) unconsciously and often spontaneously: the medium is known as an automatist. *Clairvoyance* ('clear seeing'), the ability to see or discern objects not within reach of the eye under normal conditions (alleged especially of persons in the trance or hypnotic state); second-sight, seer-ship. *Clairaudience* ('clear hearing'), the ability to perceive sounds not within reach of the ear under normal conditions (alleged especially of persons in the trance or hypnotic state). *Psychometry* or *tactile clairvoyance*, said to be possessed by persons capable of divining, by means of physical contact, the properties or character of a thing with which it has

been associated. The *direct voice*, the voice of an alleged spirit or entity controlling a medium, which manifests independently of the vocal organs of the medium. *Hypnotism*, an artificially induced somnambulistic state ('hypnosis') in which the mind becomes passive, acting readily upon suggestion or direction, and upon regaining normal consciousness retaining little or no recollection of the actions or ideas dominant during the hypnotic state. Sometimes this state is self-induced. *Precognition*, supernormal knowledge of future events. *Scrying*, divination by gazing into a crystal, pool of ink, back of a spoon or other reflecting surface. Also called crystal gazing. The 'pictures' seen by the scryer are, of course, subjective. *Telepathy*, *thought-transference*, *extra-sensory perception*, the sympathetic affection of one mind or person by another at a distance, through a supposed emotional influence and without any direct communication by the normal channels of sense. *Xenoglossy*, speaking in a real language of which the medium has no conscious knowledge. Common to most or all mental phenomena is the fact of a person acquiring knowledge in a supernormal manner. The knowledge itself is usually of a normal type; it is the manner alone of its acquisition that constitutes the supernormal element.

Physical phenomena include *apports* (from the French verb *apporter*, to bring, produce), objects supernormally brought into the *séance*-room; *levitation*, the supernormal raising of an object or person, thus apparently overcoming the force of gravity; *materialisation*, the production of spirits or entities, in the form, likeness, or appearance of human beings, either in whole or part, which are said to be composed of 'ectoplasm' or 'teleplasm', *q.v.* '*Pseudopod*' (literally 'false foot') is an ectoplasmic limb, extrusion, lever, rod, stump, or mass, usually only partly formed, which is produced in the same way as a 'full-form' materialisation; *raps*, percussive knocks or taps produced on table, chairs, walls, etc., by means other than normal; *slate-writing*, the direct writing or 'spirit' messages which appear

on slates, sometimes locked and sealed, at a *séance* usually held for the purpose (the psychic is known as a 'slate-writing medium'); *spirit photograph*, a portrait of a deceased person alleged to have been supernormally produced by a medium upon a photographic plate (if a message in writing or a drawing appears on the plate, with or without its being exposed in the camera, it is known as a *skotograph* or *psychograph*); *table-tipping* or *table-turning*, movements of a table, on the surface of which a number of persons are resting their fingers with the object of obtaining 'spirit' messages—the table tipping once for 'yes', twice for 'no', etc.; or the alphabet is recited, the table tipping at certain letters which, eventually, form sentences; *telekinesis*, the supernormal displacement of objects; *teleplasm* or *ectoplasm*, an amorphous substance externalised or produced by a medium during a *séance* and used to build up 'psychic rods', 'pseudopods', or other 'materialisations'; *trumpet phenomena*, spirit voices or messages given through a metal trumpet, cardboard cylinder, or similar tube, by means other than the medium's own vocal organs (*cf.* 'direct voice').

Miscellaneous phenomena include *haunting* (which needs no explanation); *phantasm*, a subjective vision or appearance in which a mental image is taken to be an external reality; *Poltergeist* (from the German verb *poltern*, to rattle, and *Geist*, ghost), similar to haunting, except that the disturbing entity is usually of a noisy or mischievous nature. *Poltergeist* phenomena are often associated with adolescents, and very rarely with mediums.

There are other phases of mediumship and various types of phenomena which I have not described, because they belong to the realm of abnormal psychology, and the reader is very unlikely to come into contact with them. But, for the sake of completeness, I will mention them: they include: *dissociation of personality* or *multiple personality*, *cryptomnesia*, *impersonation*, *possession*, etc. It should be understood that, although I have

described the various kinds of alleged phenomena, it has not been scientifically proved that the phenomena themselves are genuine, though a *prima facie* case has been made out for some of them.

I will now give a few suggestions for testing mediums, beginning with those who produce 'mental' phenomena. I will group automatism, clairvoyance, tactile clairvoyance, clairaudience and scrying under one head, as the same precautions should be taken when investigating any of these phases of mediumship. In each case the medium supplies some information that is supposed to be obtained supernormally, and it is your duty, as a sitter, to see that the psychic is given no opportunity of acquiring this information normally, subsequently handing it back to you during the *séance*, or at a future sitting.

We will assume that you wish to test a certain *clairvoyante* or trance medium who is unknown to you personally. The first thing to do is to make sure that she does not know you, even by repute. In any case, call yourself X. Then find her telephone number and get a friend (someone unknown to the medium) to make an appointment for you by phone, using a call box for this purpose. Do not telephone from your home or from a friend's house. If the medium has no telephone number, get a friend to write to her, making an appointment. Do not write yourself. It is extraordinary how much information an astute person can glean from a simple letter. The handwriting, composition, quality of paper, etc., all tell their own story. Even a typed letter conveys to an intelligent person certain characteristics which are better not displayed.

Having made an appointment with the medium, arrive at her house punctually. Do not drive up in your car, as index numbers have proved useful to dishonest mediums, and certain *indicia* can be gleaned from a private motor. If you cannot walk, take a taxi. Do not wear a uniform or other distinguishing badge of your trade or profession, though sometimes a man has

his profession written all over him. Do not carry a book or journal, as information can be gleaned from your taste in literature. Wear no ring, and, if you are married, remove your wedding ring some days previous to your visit, so that the mark made by it has had time to disappear.

If you visit the psychic in cold weather and (assuming you are a man) wear an overcoat, remove everything from the pockets, and cut off the maker's tab and your own name which will be found usually in the inside breast pocket. Do not gossip with the servant who opens the door to you: just say that you have an appointment with Madame Z.

There is some difference of opinion as to whether a sitter should be accompanied by a friend. I consider that he should go alone. Friends occasionally divulge (unconsciously) considerable information about a sitter—especially if they happen to be talkative. If you have a secretary who is discreet, silent, and can be trusted, and if you consider that a witness is necessary, then you can take your employé with you. But it is best to go alone.

Having introduced yourself as 'X', take the chair offered you, sit down, *and be silent*. Let the medium do all the talking, but take full and careful notes of everything she says. Do not ask questions, and do not prompt the medium. Although she may be in a trance—real or alleged—she will probably ask you certain questions, or pause in her recital, waiting for some reply. Do not speak, if possible. If she insists upon asking you questions, reply that you would rather not answer. If she is 'controlled' by a 'spirit guide' (often a child or a Red Indian) who insists upon holding a conversation with you, be pleasant and laugh at the controlling entity's inevitable jokes, but do not answer direct questions.

There is one exception to the rule of silence which I have emphasised above. Sometimes a 'communicator' will manifest through the entranced medium and his—or her—remarks may be of such a nature that it is impossible to continue the *séance*

without some reply from yourself. For example, the 'spirit' may announce itself as your 'uncle Bert' and pause for your reaction. It is permissible for you to try and prove that some relative is communicating, and your questions and the communicator's replies will then be something like this:

*Comm.* I am uncle Bert.

*Sitt.* When did you die?

*Comm.* In the autumn of 1917, in France.

*Sitt.* Where?

*Comm.* At Ypres.

*Sitt.* How old were you?

*Comm.* Forty-three.

*Sitt.* Where were you buried?

*Comm.* In France.

*Sitt.* Where?

*Comm.* [Reply unintelligible.]

*Sitt.* Had you any brothers or sisters?

*Comm.* Three.

*Sitt.* What were their names?

*Comm.* Annie, Peter and Tom.

*Sitt.* Where were you born?

*Comm.* In the North.

*Sitt.* What town?

*Comm.* Near Liverpool.

*Sitt.* Where?

*Comm.* [Reply unintelligible.]

*Sitt.* Were you related on my mother's or father's side?

*Comm.* Your father's brother.

*Sitt.* What was my father's full name?

*Comm.* [No reply.]

*Medium.* Your uncle appears to have gone, and another communicator wishes to speak.

The above is a good example of how a conversation between

a communicating entity and sitter should be conducted. It will be noted that the spirit made certain definite statements, capable of being checked, but avoided direct questions. It is more than probable that you never had an uncle Bert, and possibly no relative killed in the War. But you may have had an aunt Annie and perhaps some relatives who once lived 'near Liverpool'. These few 'hits' are not very impressive, as many thousands of persons possess an aunt Annie and a million people live near Liverpool. But you go home wondering (having paid the medium's fee *in cash*) and decide to have another guinea's worth at a future date when—I hope—you will be just as cautious. Although I have selected a visit to a clairvoyant or trance medium as the model way of going to a medium, my rules are equally as good when applied to a crystal gazer or automatic writer. In the case of the latter, the automatist will present you with her script, and you will not have to take so many notes. But be sure and carefully record what the medium asks, and compare these notes with the automatic script when you get home. By the way, do not gossip with the medium after the *séance*. Leave the house at once.

I have now told you what you owe yourself in going to a *séance*, but you should also be fair to the medium. Whether the psychic is false or genuine, you should visit her in a spirit of hopefulness and goodwill. Do not try to mislead her by making untrue statements; do not try to catch her out by asking questions to which you are certain you will receive untrue answers. Be courteous and play the game. And, although convinced that the *séance* was a swindle from start to finish, pay your guinea with a smile: you will have received a guinea's worth of experience, anyway. If the medium happens to be genuine, any bad behaviour on your part will most certainly spoil the sitting for you, and you may miss some first-class evidence. There is a psychological factor which plays its part in a good *séance*. If you are sceptical, do not parade the fact: the person who exudes



scepticism will never get very far in psychical research. And if you see something suspicious at a sitting, don't grab.

So far, I have told you what to do when testing a medium at a private sitting. But if you go to a 'circle' or meeting for public clairvoyance, the same rules hold good except that it is very unlikely that you will be permitted to impose any conditions. At a circle, the medium often has one or two credulous favourites who monopolise the attention of the communicating entities, and the casual visitor stands little chance of acquiring 'evidence'. And the 'circle' has other disadvantages. The *clairvoyante* will perhaps say: 'I see a lady in black, middle-aged, white hair, passed over about fourteen years ago. I get the name Mary.' In a largish circle, at least three or four sitters will claim the 'entity' as some relative, and I have been present when there has been unseemly wrangling as to whom the entity belonged. Public clairvoyance is even more unsatisfactory. On one occasion I attended a public meeting at Brighton and the *clairvoyante* gave us a description (which was so ambiguous that it could have been applied to a hundred different persons) of a man whose earth name sounded like 'Jaber' (that is what I thought the medium said). Immediately, about forty persons in the large hall claimed the entity as a relative. The medium was in a quandary as to whom to 'award' the entity, and finally gave it up as a bad job. I spoke to two of those who had claimed the spirit. One man told me he thought the medium said 'Draper'; a young woman was quite certain that the *clairvoyante* said 'Jago', because an uncle of that name had died some years previously. The name Jaber sounds like so many other surnames (e.g. Faber, Favor, Mavor, Neighbour, etc.) that the 'test' was valueless. And yet the medium hailed it as a great success. And if such a result is possible with an uncommon name like 'Jaber', is it any wonder that 'spirits' with such common names as Smith, Jones and Robinson claim so many excited and credulous 'relatives' at public clairvoyance meet-

ings? These meetings are worthless from an evidential point of view, but they are useful for putting money in the pockets of the mediums.

We now come to physical phenomena, and I am speaking from experience when I state that, if the reader has witnessed such phenomena at a *séance*, it is a thousand to one that they were fraudulent. Genuine manifestations of this nature are excessively rare and it is most unlikely that the casual inquirer will ever see them: he will see plenty of spurious phenomena. But we will assume that the reader has the opportunity of testing a physical medium, and I will now give a few directions for safeguarding him as far as possible. I have already stated that physical phenomena include 'apports', telekinesis, materialisations, lights, levitation, slate-writing, spirit photographs, raps, etc., and during the production of any of these manifestations it is of vital importance that the medium be rigidly controlled—a problem of great difficulty.

In the first place, nearly every physical medium insists on Stygian darkness in which to 'work', and much music, singing and other noises to help him produce the right 'atmosphere', and an easy entry into the trance state. Unfortunately, the conditions he usually demands are the very worst for the investigator, as the two senses most necessary for the inquiry, *i.e.* sight and hearing, are rendered useless. So, for a first condition, ask the medium if he will sit in a white light. He will refuse and most likely compromise by agreeing to a 'good red light', which will most certainly be reduced to blackness a few minutes after the *séance* has started. Curiously enough, two of the most impressive physical mediums, D. D. Home<sup>1</sup> and Anna Rasmussen,<sup>2</sup> 'worked' in full light.

<sup>1</sup>See *Experiences in Spiritualism with D. D. Home*, by Viscount Adare, London, 1870.

<sup>2</sup>See 'Experimental Inquiries into Telekinesis. An Account of Experiments Made with the Mediumship of Mrs. Anna Rasmussen', by Christian Winther,

Having settled the lighting arrangements (invariably to the medium's satisfaction, and seldom to the investigator's), there comes the question of the control of the medium's person. There are four principal ways of immobilising a medium: (a) tactual control; (b) a mechanical or electrical control; (c) by placing him in a gauze 'cage' or cabinet, or gauze bag; (d) a photographic control. Of course, the idea of a rigid control is to prevent the medium doing by normal means what he states he—or the spirits—can do abnormally. Clearly, he must be given no opportunity for producing fraudulent phenomena, either consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously. On no account allow yourself to be persuaded to consent to his being tied up with a rope. It is impossible to tie a person securely with one piece of rope, and you will be asking for trickery.<sup>1</sup>

The tactual method of control is a good one if thoroughly and conscientiously carried out. Two trusted, intelligent, youngish and alert persons should sit on either side of the medium, each controller being responsible for an arm and a leg.<sup>2</sup> The controller on the right of the medium should link his left arm through the medium's right arm, and the controller's right hand should firmly grasp the right wrist and hand of the psychic. The controller should then curl his left leg round the right leg of the medium, keeping firm and continuous contact. The person on the medium's left should control his side in a similar manner. This is a very pleasant and comfortable method of control for all concerned, and one can sit for hours without becoming cramped or feeling tired. It is probable that during

New York, 1928 (in *Psychic Research*, Vol. XXII, Nos. 1-5, Jan.-May); and *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London (Gollancz), 1933, pp. 154-65.

<sup>1</sup>See *Magical Rope Ties and Escapes*, by Harry Houdini (i.e. Ehrich Weiss), London [1921].

<sup>2</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, *op. cit.* Plate I is a photograph showing the control of Willh Schneider by two persons. The method is a variant of that given in this chapter.

the *séance* the medium will, in the trance paroxysms, attempt to shift his limbs or even remove them from control. This is met by each controller recording the *exact* position of each limb every minute or so, or even every few seconds. All this information is taken down in shorthand (or repeated into a dictaphone) by the note-taker. Selecting our right-hand controller, he would call out something like the following, the note-taker adding the times:

- 9.33 Right hand on chest.
- 9.33½ Right hand on knee.
- 9.34 Right leg forward, out of control.
- 9.34½ Right leg in control again.
- 9.35 Head on breast.
- 9.36 Right hand on face.
- 9.36½ Right hand on knee.
- 9.37 Medium standing up, leg out of control.
- 9.38½ Medium on chair again.
- 9.39 Right leg in control again.
- 9.40 Medium scratching his face.

The person controlling the left side of medium would be calling out similar information, which would also be recorded by the note-taker. It will be understood that the controllers' hands naturally follow the movements of the medium's hands, and are still keeping their grip on his wrists. If a controller's hand or leg loses contact with the medium, the control is *definitely* broken, and is so recorded in the protocol. Should phenomena occur during the *séance*, the official observer calls out what they are, their intensity and duration, and the note-taker duly records these facts, adding the exact time that each phenomenon occurs. By comparing the times of phenomena with the controllers' record it is easy to see whether the manifestations took place while the medium was under proper control. With this form of control, it is better to have *two* note-takers, one to

record exclusively the remarks of the controllers, the other to register the phenomena. The note-takers should have two watches which are exactly synchronised, and the two records should be compared at the end of the *séance*. If one set of notes showed that at 9.53 'lights' were seen, and the other that at 9.53 the medium's left hand was out of control, obviously the phenomenon would not be recorded in the subsequent report as being considered of supernormal origin. I mentioned the example of the 'light', but actually these can be produced by means of the mouth.

The tactual control described above is suitable for most mediums producing telekinesis, 'apports', 'spirit lights', materialisations, etc., though special precautions—to be described later—are necessary when investigating certain types of physical phenomena. But the electrical control is also very good, and for details of this system (first used by Schrenck-Notzing and developed by the present writer) I must refer the reader to my experiments with Rudi Schneider, where the control is explained in detail.<sup>1</sup> Of the two, the electrical control is the more satisfactory.

The 'gauze cage' method of controlling a medium is as simple as it is efficient when applied to those psychics who produce materialisations, 'apports', or telekinesis. The cage should be strongly constructed of wood and large enough to contain the medium, comfortably seated. The top and bottom should be solid, with strong, fine gauze or bolting-cloth sides. The material should be glued to the framework of the 'cage' and thin strips of wood should further secure the edges. On one side of the cage should be hung a door (framework covered with gauze) with two locks and two bolts (top and bottom), all fastenings being outside. The medium is comfortably seated in the 'cage' and all he has to do is to produce the phenomena.

<sup>1</sup>See *Rudi Schneider: a Scientific Examination of His Mediumship*, by Harry Price, London (Methuen), 1930, pp. 7-11.

Some years ago I invented a fraud-proof 'cage-table',<sup>1</sup> which answers the same purpose, and which we used with some success.

But the best method of all is the photographic control, assuming that the medium still insists upon sitting in the dark. The photographic control is simply a cinematographic record of a *séance*. Invisible infra-red rays are used as the illuminant and a cinematographic negative stock, sensitive to the infra-red, is employed in the camera. The medium need not be held at all, as a continuous picture of the psychic is being produced during the whole of the *séance* with, perhaps, a photographic record of the phenomena, if any. Unfortunately, the photographic control has not yet reached perfection, owing to technical difficulties. It is possible to take infra-red time exposures in the dark; it is possible to take short exposures in a dull light; but it is *not* yet possible to produce a fully-exposed film of a *séance* in complete darkness, though we are nearing our goal. When we reach it, the day of the fraudulent medium will be over. He can sit in the complete blackness which he invariably demands, but his every action will be recorded photographically, without quibble or question, by means of a slow-motion cinematograph camera.

We will now assume that you have had your first *séance* with a physical medium (it does not follow that he is genuine because he takes no money for his services) and are impressed with what you have seen and heard: you arrange for further experiments. Although you consider that your control of the psychic was good, it can be improved upon—by means of the *fore-control*, *i.e.* the examination of the medium before he even enters the *séance*-room. If he has been producing telekinesis, 'apports', 'lights', or materialisations, it is possible that a piece of apparatus or some chemical has been introduced surreptitiously

<sup>1</sup>See 'A Séance Table for the Study of Telekinesis', by Harry Price, an article in *Psychic Research*, Vol. XXII, No. 6, June 1928. Photographs are given in *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, *op. cit.*, Plate XL.

into the *séance*-room. The fore-control is to prevent that sort of thing, and this is the procedure:

When the medium arrives at your house (it is a waste of time to attend sittings for physical phenomena at the medium's own home, or to attempt to investigate physical mediums at public *séances*), escort him into a room on the street level, assuming that the sitting is to be held in an upper apartment. Whether your medium is a man or a woman, have two medical men in attendance as searchers, and let them strip and thoroughly search the medium, removing all clothes to another apartment. Women are no good for this job as they are too sympathetic and emotional, more easily deceived, and have less knowledge of deceptive methods. The medium should now be thoroughly medically examined, all body orifices being explored. (This is particularly important where 'spirit lights' are concerned.) If the medium is a woman and she is genuine, she will not mind a medical man making this very necessary examination in the cause of science; if the woman is a faker, and has something to hide, she will protest loudly against the 'indelicacy' of the proceedings. If she refuses to be examined, cancel the *séance* and send her home. If the weather is hot, she will probably be seen on the beach the next day, exposing nine-tenths of her person to the public gaze.

It may be thought that a strict medical examination of a physical medium is quite unnecessary and that a simple search is all that is required. But experience tells us that one cannot examine a medium too closely. In the case of Pasquale Erto, the Neapolitan 'rainbow man', even a strict medical examination failed to reveal the hiding-places of the tiny bits of material with which he produced his famous 'psychic lights'.<sup>1</sup> It was a

<sup>1</sup>See: 'Phénomènes lumineux inédits obtenus avec le médium Erto', by L. R. Sanguinetti, and 'Les Expériences de Gênes avec le médium Erto', by W. Mackenzie, two articles in the *Revue Métapsychique*, Paris, for Nov.-Dec. 1922. Also the same journal for May-June, and July-August 1924 for experiments by Dr. Gustave Geley. See also *L'Opinion* (Paris) for May 23 and 30,

series of accidents that put the investigators on the right scent. And it was never discovered how another 'luminous medium', Janusz Fronczek,<sup>1</sup> produced his 'lights', which emanated from the mouth. But it was proved that he was responsible for other spurious physical phenomena, and there was no reason why the 'lights' should have been genuine. Even the severe gynecological examination to which Mrs. Helen Duncan submitted herself failed to reveal the hidden masses of cheese-cloth with which her 'spooks' were manufactured, and it was not until I used the X-rays on her that we finally solved the problem as to where she kept the stuff.<sup>2</sup> The most difficult part of a person to explore is the stomach: nothing short of a stomach pump, stomach camera or an emetic will reveal its hidden 'treasures' in the way of 'apports', etc., which can be regurgitated at will.

Those who consider that a strict examination of a psychic is unnecessary should read the highly diverting history of the 'Flower Medium'. About eighteen months ago (I am writing in September 1935) a young woman typist announced to a credulous world that she had the faculty of materialising roses and other blooms *in full light*. Now this was a psychic novelty which whetted the appetites of jaded phenomena-hunters and there was a scramble to obtain sittings with her. One society after another 'investigated' her, without apparently finding anything suspicious. The young woman was paraded before distinguished scientists, who, of course, were *not* allowed to impose their own conditions: they were merely invited to watch the miracle. A Sunday newspaper<sup>3</sup> published a non-committal article (sufficient to damn any other person but a

1924. For the London experiments with Erto, see *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 354-76.

<sup>1</sup>See *Proceedings*, London S.P.R., Jan. 1926 (Part 97, Vol. XXXVI).

<sup>2</sup>See *Regurgitation and the Duncan Mediumship*, by Harry Price, London, 1931. *Bulletin I* of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research.

<sup>3</sup>See 'Girl Medium Baffles All the Scientists', in the *Sunday Dispatch* for Mar. 24, 1935.



medium) concerning her, with some excellent photographs of the 'bulge' under her bathing costume, showing the 'formation' of the 'materialised' blooms. As a matter of routine I applied, through a friend, for a sitting with her. My friend was informed that I would *not* be given a *séance*, and would not be allowed in any house where a sitting was being held. I felt flattered. To think that I was the only person in England who could not see the flowers 'materialise' was indeed a compliment—all the greater, because the 'Flower Medium's' devotees were running after the scientists in order to obtain their *cachet*.

Though I could not obtain a sitting myself, a number of my friends had *séances*, and from them I received accounts of how the proceedings were conducted. The young woman (who invariably brought a suitcase with her) was conducted to a bedroom where she removed her ordinary clothes and donned a bathing suit and a short coatee. During this undressing business she was supposed to be examined by two women searchers. I never heard of a man being invited to assist. Though it takes an ordinary woman about three minutes to change her clothes, the 'Flower Medium' was sometimes an hour in getting into her bathing costume, having to 'rest' every few minutes. At last, when all was ready, she would be conducted to the *séance*-room, where, after a few minutes in which to go into 'trance', it would be noticed that a 'bulge' was forming in the small of her back. The 'bulge' would then travel to the front of her, finally dropping into her lap in the form of roses (always without thorns), complete with 'dew'. There was usually a rose for each person, except when Scots were present, when heather was—very appropriately—produced for them.

These proceedings were so silly, and so fantastic, that, one would have thought, a child could not have been deceived. But people flocked to her and her doings filled the psychic press. Of course, a number of people began to get suspicious (!) and a friend of mine, Mrs. A. Peel Goldney, actually discovered some

of the roses in the medium's bag after a *séance*. At last, on August 9, 1935, the farce ended. A group of spiritualists were investigating her and discovered that, when she was changing into her bathing dress, roses were dropping all over the room! Then they found some more between her legs, and the woman finally confessed<sup>1</sup> that she had purchased the roses at a shop. The psychic Press made much of the fact that it was the spiritualists who 'exposed' her—for the simple reason that no expert psychical researcher was allowed to do so. Remarkable as this case is as an example of credulity, it had a still more remarkable sequel. Immediately the woman's written confession was published, it was announced<sup>2</sup> that *eight months previously* the spiritualists had put detectives on her track, and she had been seen buying roses at various shops. But it was only when the 'Flower Medium' was finally exposed that these vital facts were published. I am afraid I have digressed, but the case of the 'Flower Medium' is *so important* as showing how *not* to do things. A scientific psychical researcher would have burst the bubble at the first *séance*.<sup>3</sup>

To continue, assuming that the medium has submitted to a thorough medical examination, he—or she—should be asked to

<sup>1</sup>See 'The "Flower Medium's" Confession', by F. N. C. Bell, in *Light* (London) for Aug. 15, 1935, and 'The "Flower Medium" Exposed: Spiritualists Unmask a Blatant Fraud', in *The Two Worlds* (Manchester) for Aug. 16, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>See 'The "Flower Medium's" Career', by Mrs. Hewat McKenzie, in *Light* for Aug. 22, 1935, and '"Flower Medium": More Facts', also by Mrs. Hewat McKenzie, in *The Two Worlds* for Aug. 23, 1935.

<sup>3</sup>As this work goes to press, I can record that I have attended a *séance* with the 'Flower Medium'—at a cocktail party! I was not permitted to take any part in the control (or fore-control) of the medium, who, before about thirty people, and in full light, produced five common thornless roses, with stems cut with a knife, from under her coat. Later in the evening I had a private *séance* with her (in the dark) for 'psychic lights' (not produced) which turned to 'apports' in the shape of a handful of shingle found under a cushion. As she had been in the room for two hours previous to my sitting, the portion of sea-shore cannot be regarded as having arrived supernormally. This was on October 9, 1935.

don a one-piece tricôt suit or tights, buttoning at the back, supplied by the experimenters. To the ends of sleeves and legs of the tights should be sewn bands covered with luminous paint.<sup>1</sup> A warm dressing-gown (without pockets) should now be wrapped round the medium, who should be escorted upstairs to the *séance*-room by the two doctors, each holding an arm. If the sitting is held in a flat, the room where the medium is examined and the *séance*-room should be as far apart as possible. The medium having been led into the *séance*-room, he should be handed over to the two controllers (if the tactual method is used), immobilised by the electrical system, or placed in the 'cage' *immediately*.

I have said a good deal about the medium, but the choice of sitters is also important. Choose your assistants carefully. Refuse to work with a person who is ultra-credulous or obstinately incredulous. Select people you can trust: those who will not interfere with your arrangements or the medium. The ideal sitter is he who is thoroughly interested in psychical research, is sympathetic to the medium, but who insists upon scientific methods of investigation. Do not allow any sitter to 'manage' the *séance* for you. Bar those who keep on 'interfering' or think they know more than you do. Invite suggestions, but use your own judgment as to whether you shall act upon them. Do not form too large a circle (which should link hands—chain formation—during a *séance*; seven or eight is a good number), and introduce two or three women sitters—but *not* those likely to shriek or scream when a 'psychic hand' (probably a white glove stuffed with damp cotton wool) brushes their face. And do not admit talkative women, as they distract the circle and make observation difficult. But the right kind of woman at a *séance* is an asset, and has a good influence

<sup>1</sup>See 'Radio-Active Compounds and Their Use in Psychical Research', by Harry Price, New York, 1926 (an article in the *Journal of the American S.P.R.*, Vol. XX, No. 7, July).

—psychologically—on the male medium, especially if he is young. And two or three women at a sitting help to make those harmonious conditions so necessary for the production of good phenomena.

There is one person you should *not* admit to the *séance*, if you can possibly help it. That person is the medium's 'manager', 'secretary', 'patron', or 'next friend'—or whatever the name he goes under. It is difficult enough to control the medium himself, without having to look after *two* persons. In the case of a fraudulent medium, it is often the manager who produces the 'phenomena', as he gets a better chance of 'putting over' the entertainment, and is not usually suspected—by the credulous. If the medium will not sit without the person who is 'running' him, see that the latter is placed between two sitters you can trust, as far away from the medium as possible. The 'manager' wants as much looking after—often more—than the psychic himself.

Some people, with the best intentions in the world, make bad sitters. It is just possible that the investigator himself is totally unfitted to examine a medium, or take charge of a *séance*. His personality may clash with that of every medium with whom he comes in contact. It is no one's fault, but the sooner he realises it, and quits psychical research, the better. He is merely wasting his time.

I have now told the reader how to test a medium,<sup>1</sup> but there are certain types of phenomena for which special controlling conditions are required: I will commence with 'apports'.

There is no good evidence that an 'apport' has ever appeared in a *séance*-room or elsewhere. But if you think that your particular medium *is* producing them, the severe fore-control that you imposed on the psychic must be extended to the sitters themselves. Assuming that flowers, pebbles, or small mammals

<sup>1</sup>An excellent little work for the prospective investigator is, *How to Go to a Medium*, by E. J. Dingwall, London, 1927.

have been 'supernormally' introduced into the *séance*-room (spiritualist literature is full of such cases), your next sitting must be held in a room absolutely devoid of anything in the way of furniture except the few wooden chairs on which the circle sits. All hangings, carpets and ornaments must be removed, and chimney stopped up. Keyhole must be plugged, windows sealed, and door locked and bolted from the *outside*. Every person taking part in the *séance* must remove his clothes, which should be searched and examined by two persons (strangers to all present) who are *not* taking part in the proceedings. When a sitter has been searched, he is permitted to dress, under supervision, and is taken to the *séance*-room and the key turned on him. When all have been examined and have donned their clothes, the medium (having been previously examined by the doctors) should be led into the *séance*-room and the door finally locked and bolted. No one who took part in the examination of sitters or medium should be allowed in the *séance*-room. If this fore-control was rigidly imposed on all who took part in the sitting, and 'apports' were still produced, I should much like to have particulars of the *séance*. Though collusion could still account for the phenomena, the chances of fraud were much lessened, and there is a *primâ facie* case for further scientific investigation.

'Materialising mediums' are few and far between; but there are still a few 'working', though the evidence for 'materialisations' is poor. Any medium producing 'full-forms' or 'pseudopods' should be subjected to a rigid fore-control, previous to the tactual, electrical, or gauze cage controlling system employed at the sitting itself. A good substitute for the gauze cage is a gauze bag, into which the medium is sewn. But the job must be done thoroughly. If materialisations are produced under your own conditions and while the medium is in the bag, there is evidence that further experiments are worth while.

The most famous materialisations recorded in the annals of

psychical research were those produced through the mediumship of Miss Florrie Cook in the presence of Sir William Crookes. During the years 1873-4 Sir William held many *séances* with Miss Cook, then aged eighteen, and announced to his scientific brethren that he had obtained 'absolute proof'<sup>1</sup> of spirit materialisation. The spirit was 'Katie King', the daughter of 'John King', alleged to have been a pirate. Katie materialised in Sir William's study on many occasions and in one week no fewer than forty-four photographs of the spirit were obtained, with the electric light as an illuminant. Five cameras were used, and the materialised form was photographed from different angles. Many times both medium and spirit were seen together, 'under the full blaze of the electric light', and they were photographed together on one occasion. Sir William also embraced the spirit on March 29, 1874: 'On several occasions she [Katie] took my arm when walking, and the impression conveyed to my mind that it was a living woman by my side, instead of a visitor from the other world, was so strong that . . . I asked her permission to clasp her in my arms. . . . Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did—well, as any gentleman would do under the circumstances.'<sup>2</sup> Both 'Katie' and Florrie Cook were good-looking girls. Copies of Sir William's photographs are extant, but the negatives have disappeared. Sir William's experiments with Florrie Cook are one of the major mysteries of psychical research. I am afraid that I must inform the reader that at a *séance* on January 9, 1880, Florrie Cook was seized by Sir George Sitwell, and was found to be dressed only in her underclothes, masquerading as a spirit. Of course, this incident does not necessarily prove that Florrie cheated during the Crookes experiments.

It is a bold medium who produces materialisations to-day, and this particular phase of mediumship has always attracted

<sup>1</sup>See *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, by Sir William Crookes, F.R.S., London [1874], p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* p. 106.

the fakers—some very clever. Even William T. Stead (1849-1912), the famous and credulous spiritualist, did not believe in materialising mediums. By the merest chance, I have just come into possession of a letter written by him in 1895. It was found in a bundle of second-hand books which a friend recently purchased in Dundee. He kindly presented it to me. The letter is typed upon the *Review of Reviews* printed memo-form, and is headed 'Mowbray House, Norfolk Street, Strand, London, W.C.' The letter is addressed to 'Mr. J. M. Nicholl, 7, Seymour Place, Paradise Road, Dundee'. It is dated October 8, 1895. This is the letter:

'DEAR MR. NICHOLL,

I cannot recommend you to any materialising medium, nor do I think that materialisation is by any means the best form of manifestation. It is the one most open to imposture, and my experience is that materialising spirits never say anything worth listening to. You had better experiment with the Ouija in that way if any of your circle is at all mediumistic. You will get much better results than by searching for materialising mediums.

I am,

Yours truly,

(Signed) W. T. STEAD.'

Really, I could not have written a better letter myself, and I do not know what the spiritualists will think of it, as, forty years ago, there were several well-known materialising mediums at work. I suggest to the reader that he takes Stead's advice.

Slate-writing *séances* are usually held in the light, and are rarely heard of in this country. A few years ago I had a sitting with the famous Mrs. Pruden, the American slate-writer, which was quite unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup> As there are *hundreds of ways*

<sup>1</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-30.

of getting 'spirit messages' on slates, locked and unlocked, it is impossible for me even to begin to tell the reader what to do. I recommend him to study the subject in the many conjuring books devoted to 'slate-writing'.<sup>1</sup>

'Spirit lights' are frequently seen at public *séances*, and semi-public circles, but not often experimentally at a private sitting. In addition to the rigid fore-control, and *séance* control, the medium's mouth, teeth, etc., should be specially examined. Tiny bits of ferro-cerium (the 'flint' you put in your pocket lighter) should be looked for. The medium should be asked to take a hot bath in the presence of the medical men, and his *hair* should be thoroughly washed. Tiny pieces of chemicals, etc., are easily secreted in the body orifices and, in a man, under the prepuce.<sup>2</sup> During the *séance* itself, the medium's hands and fingers should be specially controlled.

Telekinetic phenomena are imitated fraudulently by means of simple pieces of apparatus such as wires, thin rods, horse-hairs, telescopic reaching-rods, the hands, feet—and confederates. A thorough fore- and *séance*-control should prevent apparatus being introduced into the *séance*-room, and confederacy can be made difficult by excluding the medium's friends and having fresh sitters at each experiment. There is fairly good evidence for telekinetic phenomena.<sup>3</sup>

'Raps' are difficult to locate, and still more difficult to identify. There is good evidence for supernormal raps. The medium alleged to be responsible for psychic raps should be put under a good tactual control, and a small table (such as a coffee table) should be placed in front of him. He—or his 'guide'—should be asked to produce raps on the table. If successful, the table should be moved still farther from him, and further raps

<sup>1</sup>See *Spirit Slate Writing and Kindred Phenomena*, by William Ellsworth Robinson ('Chung Ling Soo'), New York and London, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

<sup>3</sup>See *Rudi Schneider: a Scientific Examination of His Mediumship*, by Harry Price, *op. cit.*



requested. If raps still continue in—or on—the table, various combinations of raps (such as rap-rap-pause-rap, rap-pause-rap-pause, and so on) should be asked for. If raps are still continued under really stringent control, the case should be reported to a psychic laboratory where instruments are to be found for recording the raps, determining *where* the raps come from, their intensity, etc. It is extremely difficult to locate a slight noise in the dark, and what you think is a supernormal rap on the table is very likely a normal rap (caused by wind, wood shrinking, etc.) on a window frame or chair.

'Teleplasm' or 'ectoplasm' are purely conventional and arbitrary terms for a very elusive substance. We think it has been produced at *séances*, but there is no scientific evidence that such is the case. It has never been collected or analysed, though specimens of alleged teleplasm have been secured: they turned out to be composed of white of egg, wood pulp, toilet paper, and other normal substances.<sup>1</sup> There is no rule by which we can tell teleplasm when we see it, though it is supposed to be the stuff of which 'materialisations', pseudopods, etc., are made. There is no evidence that it has anything to do with spirits. Should 'teleplasm' be secured at a *séance*, place in a bottle of absolute alcohol, and ask an analyst to examine it.

Trumpet phenomena are popular manifestations with a large class of mediums, who are called 'trumpet mediums' or 'direct voice mediums'. A trumpet medium invariably sits in complete darkness, is seldom controlled in any way, and does not usually go into trance. Consequently, a trumpet or direct voice *séance* is always a very unsatisfactory affair. If you are testing a trumpet medium, try to persuade him—or her—to allow some sort of control of his person, his mouth,<sup>2</sup> or his trumpet. There

<sup>1</sup>See *Regurgitation and the Duncan Mediumship*, by Harry Price, *op. cit.*, p. 78, and Appendix A, pp. 87-95.

<sup>2</sup>The author invented an electrical 'voice control recorder' which immobilised a medium's mouth; it can be seen at the laboratory of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation.

is practically no good evidence for the direct voice; conversely, many trumpet mediums have been proved to be blatant frauds. Remember that it is what a trumpet medium *says*, and not what he does, that is important. As regards your own behaviour at a trumpet *séance*, my remarks upon going to a *clairvoyante* should be taken to heart. I have never yet seen a trumpet medium whom I did not consider an utter fraud. The last time I sat with a direct voice medium, the levitated trumpet accidentally swung towards me and my hand severely knocked the knuckles of the 'spirit hand' that was sustaining the trumpet. The trumpet dropped to the floor, and the medium swooned—but fifteen minutes later he had recovered sufficiently to collect our seven-and-sixpences as we went out.

Haunted houses, phantasms and *Poltergeists* should be investigated scientifically. Before you visit the scene of an alleged haunt, obtain the fullest evidence from as many persons as possible as to what has been seen or heard at the house. On their reports you can decide whether the place is worth investigating. If you decide to inquire into the case, take someone with you, and make further inquiries on the spot. If you still think it worth while to continue, ascertain exactly what the phenomena are, where and when seen (especially the exact days and times), and make your plans accordingly. If the phenomena occur inside the building, assemble all inmates in one room under the guard of your assistant, thoroughly explore the house, and make a plan of it. Seal all doors, windows and other openings in the way I have suggested in my account of the 'most haunted house in England', and await events. If the manifestations occur only in the dark, you will have to invent some sort of electric or mechanical control in order to ascertain whether supernormal happenings take place. For example, if it is alleged that 'doors open by themselves' (a common claim) it is easy to devise a simple electric bell contact which will immediately inform you if the door has been

opened by somebody or something not under your control. Of course, it might be the wind! In investigating a haunted house, be on the look-out for rats, small boys, the villagers, the owner himself (or his family), the wind (especially in an old house), wood shrinking, the death-watch beetle, farm animals nosing the doors, etc., trees brushing against the windows, birds in the chimney-stack or between double walls, etc., etc. It is more difficult to investigate an exterior haunt, as more helpers are required and it is not easy to keep everyone in the neighbourhood under constant control. It often becomes a battle of wits with the villagers. But the remarks I made concerning an interior haunt can be applied to manifestations outside the house. If you are impressed with what you have seen and heard, visit the place again and again, taking copious notes and piling up data. Prepare a report and send it to an expert psychical researcher or to some organisation specially equipped to deal with such phases of the occult.

Psychic photography has become suddenly fashionable, and there is so much to be said concerning the gentle art of faking that I have devoted an entire chapter to the subject. Read it carefully.

Having now told the reader how to test a medium, I hope he will not depart from the rigid standard of control which I suggested to him. I have said little about the use of instruments, as the person who wants advice about testing a medium is not likely to be connected with a psychic laboratory, or to know how to use suitable instruments—even if he possesses them—in a proper way. If he finds a really good medium, and one who will submit to a rigid control, it is his duty to send a report of the case (with the protocol of his experiments) to a scientific organisation, such as the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation, and secure expert help and advice. The amateur cannot possibly investigate such phenomena as thermal changes in the *séance*-room, the cold breezes which are

so often recorded, and similar phenomena. And yet these identical manifestations may occur at his experiments without his being aware of the fact. If he *does* find a first-class medium, it is his *duty* to give science a chance of doing something with him. And I implore the reader not to hand him over to the spiritualists—even to those masquerading as a scientific society with a high-sounding title. I have no quarrel with the spiritualists, but the fact that they are a religious body makes them quite unsuitable for scientifically testing a medium—particularly one who produces physical phenomena.

## XI. Secrets of 'Spirit' Photography

Nearly every 'spirit photographer' who has 'operated' during the past fifty years has been exposed. Some have been prosecuted, a few imprisoned. William H. Mumler,<sup>1</sup> a Boston (Mass.) engraver, was the pioneer: it was proved that some of his spirit 'extras' (the technical name for the alleged supernormal pictures which appear on the negative) were those of living men, and even the spiritualists had to disown him. He was later (1868) prosecuted. A French imitator, Édouard Buguet,<sup>2</sup> was prosecuted, fined, and imprisoned (Paris 1876) for cheating the public by taking fraudulent spirit photographs. Richard Bournsell<sup>3</sup> (1832-1909), a British photographic medium, was accused of trickery by a famous spiritualist, Admiral Osborne Moore. David Duguid<sup>4</sup> (1832-1907), who produced both spirit photographs and spirit paintings, was caught cheating over and over again. One of his 'extras', a 'Cyprian priestess', was found to be a facsimile of a German picture, *Nacht*;<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See *The Mumler 'Spirit' Photograph Case*, New York, 1869; *Ansichten über die Angeblieh Neue Entdeckung von Odognostischen Photographien des Dr. William H. Mumler zu Boston in Amerika*, by Gottlieb Daemmerung, Wien, 1863.

<sup>2</sup>See *Procès des Spirites*, by Madame M. P. G. Leymarie, Paris, 1875; *Revue Spirite*, Nos. 1-12, Paris, 1875. For examples of Buguet's work, see *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, Plate XVII.

<sup>3</sup>See *Glimpses of the Next State*, by William Osborne Moore, London, 1911.

<sup>4</sup>See *Report of a Séance with David Duguid*, by L. W. Taylor, Guildford, 1905. (Unpublished MS. in the library of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation.)

<sup>5</sup>See *Encyclopædia of Psychic Science*, by Nandor Fodor, London [1934], article: Duguid, David, p. 111.

and once, upon being forcibly searched at Manchester (in 1905), ready-made 'spirit paintings' were found down his trousers. He was then aged seventy-three!<sup>1</sup>

There have been several modern spirit photographers. The greatest of them all was William Hope (1863-1933), of the so-called 'Crewe Circle' of photographic mediums. In 1922 I had a sitting with him, and caught him changing the dark-slide containing my plates which had been specially marked for me by the Imperial Dry Plate Co., Ltd. The markings, a lion rampant, were—at my suggestion—X-rayed on to each plate.<sup>2</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle and his friends abused me for years for exposing Hope—who was again thoroughly unmasked<sup>3</sup> by Mr. Fred Barlow and Major Rampling-Rose in 1932, the year before he (Hope) died.

Soon after the Hope incident I had a sitting with George H. Moss, a chauffeur-medium who specialised in spirit pictures. I saw how he tricked me, but said nothing: I was sick to death of exposing mediums. Later, Mr. Fred Barlow caught him red-handed, and Moss finally signed a full confession that all his 'extras' were produced fraudulently.<sup>4</sup>

Mrs. Ada Emma Deane is a photographic medium who is still 'working'. Years ago, I tried to obtain a sitting with her, but failed. Then, on Armistice Day 1924, she photographed the 'spirits' round the Cenotaph. Prints were circulated, and one reached the offices of the *Daily Sketch*. Their photographic staff copied and enlarged the picture—and they discovered that the 'extras' were the heads of living footballers! It took a week for

<sup>1</sup>See *Encyclopædia of Psychic Science*, by Nandor Fodor, London [1934], article: Duguid, David, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>See *Cold Light on Spiritualistic 'Phenomena'*, by Harry Price, London, 1922, reprinted from the *Journal of the London S.P.R.*, for May 1922.

<sup>3</sup>See 'Report of an Investigation into Spirit-Photography', by Fred Barlow and W. Rampling-Rose, *Proceedings*, London S.P.R., Part 129, March 1933, and *Journal of the London S.P.R.* for July 1933.

<sup>4</sup>See *Psychic Science*, Vol. IV, pp. 229-33, London, October 1925.

the *Daily Sketch* to tell its readers what they thought of Mrs. Deane's 'psychic' photographs.<sup>1</sup>

Having failed to get a sitting with Mrs. Deane, I tried the Falconer brothers, two young Scots who found they were getting 'extras' on their plates. I certainly saw the brothers, but they informed me, immediately I entered the room, that the 'power had suddenly left them'. This was on the day before they sailed for South Africa on a 'professional' tour. The Johannesburg police became suspicious, raided the boys' flat, found 'spirit pictures' in various stages of manufacture, and prosecuted them. They were convicted (1931) of producing fraudulent spirit photographs. Each brother was fined £150 and costs. They appealed, and lost.<sup>2</sup>

The last spirit photographer I tried to sit with was John Myers. We met, but he refused to give me a *séance*. I offered him £25 per hour, one hour's work per week, for twelve months, if he would produce a spirit picture in my laboratory before a panel of scientists (I intended inviting Sir Richard Gregory, Professor Julian Huxley, etc.) whom I named. He refused.<sup>3</sup> What happened to him afterwards can best be read in the *Sunday Dispatch* for October 16, 23 and 30, 1932. As I write these words, Mr. J. B. McIndoe, the President of the Spiritualists' National Union, is levelling a charge of fraud against him. In a long article, Mr. McIndoe says:<sup>4</sup> 'I . . . regret

<sup>1</sup>See the *Daily Sketch*, London, for Nov. 13-22, 1924; *Psychic Photography: Report of the Occult Committee of the Magic Circle*, London, May 1922; *Mrs. Deane, a Cat, and a Catastrophe* (unpublished MS. of an experiment, in the library of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation), London 1925.

<sup>2</sup>See the complete files of the South African papers reporting the trial and conviction of the Falconer brothers, in the library of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation; also *Light*, London, Oct. 2, 1931, p. 478.

<sup>3</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>See: 'A Charge of Fraud: Accusations against Mr. John Myers', by J. B. McIndoe, in *The Two Worlds* for Sept. 6, 1935; also the same author's 'Ex-

that I have now to give details of an experiment in which the result, in my opinion, was due to deliberate trickery by Mr. Myers.' This is strong language for the official head of the British spiritualists to use.

There have been other exposures of spirit photographers, including William M. Keeler, the American, who was the subject of a long and scathing report by the late Dr. Walter Franklin Prince.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is not intended as a history of psychic photographers, but to give the public some idea as to how the fakers get the 'extras' on to the plates. Unless a person possesses the knowledge of a chemist, photographer, optician, electrician, anatomist, physicist, and conjurer, he stands no chance whatever against a clever photographic medium, unless he imposes the control which I will describe later. There are scores of ways of deceiving the—invariably—credulous seeker after spirit portraits, and I am going to tell the reader some of them. No one has previously written a manual on how spirit pictures are produced, and very few investigators know the first thing about trickery as applied to the photographic plate or film.

At the age of eight, I was given my first camera, and a few years later produced my first 'spirit photograph'—by the still popular double exposure method. Since those early days I have made hundreds of experiments in duplicating the tricks of spirit photographers who prey upon the public, and this chapter is a *résumé* of my work. Spirit photography has become suddenly fashionable, and nearly every week I receive requests from people who wish to know how certain psychic photographs could have been faked. They supply me with so-called 'evidence' which is not worth the paper it is written on. As a

periment with Mr. John Myers: a Charge of Trickery', in *Light* for Sept. 5, 1935. See also 'Myers Exposed Again? Revelations of an Impartial Investigator', by Roy Brandon, in *The Two Worlds*, Oct. 11, 1935.

<sup>1</sup>See 'Supplementary Report on the Keeler-Lee Photographs', by Walter Franklin Prince, *Proceedings*, American S.P.R., Vol. XIII, New York, 1919.



matter of fact, there is *no* good evidence that a spirit photograph has ever been produced. Having now introduced the reader to most of the 'famous' photographic mediums, past and present, I will describe the methods by which 'spirits' can be added to the sensitised plate—whether it is supplied by the sitter or the medium.

The easiest way of fraudulently producing a 'spirit extra' upon the sensitised emulsion of a photographic plate or film is, undoubtedly, by the method known as 'double exposure'. Besides being the least difficult to produce, it is also the easiest of detection, as it is not very practicable to introduce the 'extra' into the photograph without the knowledge of the sitter—should he be using his own plates—unless the operator uses special devices, which will be discussed later.

A psychic 'extra' produced by the double exposure method, if it is to be at all convincing, presupposes the employment of either a wax lay figure (such as barbers use) or a human being as the ghostly assistant; unless the photographer makes use of the old family album, half-tone picture, or an existing photograph of the person whose 'extra' is being sought by the sitter. Moss made most of his fakes by merely copying an existing photograph or picture; but other men use other methods. When a sitter is *bonâ-fide* and serious, and brings his own plates, a certain degree of ingenuity is required in order to make the experiment convincing.

The production of a psychic photograph made by the double exposure method is simplicity itself, and well within the skill of the veriest tyro who ever pressed the button on a Kodak.

The operator first arranges his scene or background (if the plates are to be 'switched' for those of the sitter's, a black velvet background is employed), and the sitter who is to impersonate the 'extra' takes the place allotted to him. A very short exposure is now given. If the picture is being taken merely for amuse-

ment, a proper background or scene is employed, and the person or object intended to represent the 'ghost' is placed in a suitable position near the sitter: the camera is uncapped for a fraction of a second and re-capped. The 'ghost' then moves out of the picture and, without the sitter moving in the slightest degree, a normal exposure is given. The assistant who personates the 'ghost' should be draped in white, as a shorter exposure will then be necessary, greater transparency will be gained for the 'spirit', and a picture with better contrast will be the result. That is the full-form ghost.

If a head only is required as an 'extra', the live helper (or lay figure) should poke his head through a hole in a black velvet sheet. If the face is whitened, and a roll of cotton wool (or a few yards of muslin) is draped around the head, an 'extra', indistinguishable from the orthodox 'spirit' pictures extant, will be the result.

As regards the ratio of exposures, I find that if the normal picture requires five seconds, the 'ghost' should be given one second. These exposures should give good detail in the 'extra', while allowing every part of the background to show plainly through the ghostly visitant. A fairly small stop should be employed (one not larger than *f. 16* or *f. 22*), in order that the various planes of the background of the picture should be equally sharp and distinct—an important point when the artistic appearance of the picture is to be considered. A fast plate, backed for preference (to prevent halation), should be used in conjunction with a slow developer. I find paramidophenol (a proprietary brand is sold, ready for use, under the name of 'Rodinal') an excellent reagent for the development of all 'spirit' pictures. Slow in action, easy in manipulation, clean and non-staining, and with good keeping qualities, it produces negatives of fine quality with perfect gradation. Other developers derived from coal-tar are also good. Although I have mentioned the photographing of one 'ghost' or 'extra',

many subjects could be introduced into the picture in the same way, with either double or multiple exposures. A spectral army could be evolved with very little trouble.

The results obtained by double exposure can be duplicated by double or combination printing, or 'printing in'. The simplest form of multiple printing is the production of a composite photograph from two or more negatives. For instance, with a little judicious blocking out, Eros could be 'apportioned' from Piccadilly Circus and temporarily deposited in the centre of Kensington Gardens, or the Houses of Parliament might be made to appear enjoying a well-earned holiday on the sands at Blackpool. Any intelligent amateur photographer could produce these results with little trouble.

To portray a 'spirit extra' by the double-printing method is easier still as, of course, we want the background—if any—to show through the 'extra', which is popularly supposed to be transparent. To produce a ghostly picture in this way it is necessary to photograph the person or model representing the 'extra' in front of a dead-black background. The resultant negative, which should be rather under-exposed, should show the figure surrounded by almost clear glass. It is best to use films for this particular class of spurious 'spirit' photograph, otherwise the thickness of the glass will give a fuzzy appearance to the superimposed image. Sometimes, when the dishonest medium wishes his 'extras' to be 'recognised', he makes them fuzzy on purpose. The negative on which is the setting for your 'spirit' is placed in the printing-frame in the usual manner, and next to it is placed the plate or film containing your 'extra'. The two negatives are then printed, as one, in the usual way. The finished print will show your 'extra', through which the added background will be plainly visible. I need hardly inform the reader that the professional impostor does not employ this method in his abominable work. It is obvious that by this trick one 'ghost' can be made to serve for any number of settings, or

can be placed in different positions in the same setting. Groups of little fairies could be photographed from pictures or drawings and made to appear as if they were playing ring-o'-roses at the bottom of your garden.<sup>1</sup> By a similar process, one negative only is required, though in this case the 'ghost' is permanently attached to the picture. First photograph your figure in front of the black background as described above and, *without developing*, take your second picture (the setting) upon the same plate, care being taken that your 'extra' is in the conventional position on your setting. (Do not print your 'extra' upside down unless you want to raise a laugh.) This is the method usually employed by the fraudulent psychic photographer when he uses his own plates or 'switches' your plate for his own prepared one. This mode of faking plates offers a great temptation to the unskilled 'medium', who provides himself with a collection of plates already bearing the latent images of an assorted collection of faces, some of which he is certain will be 'recognised'.

It is just as easy, of course, to reproduce drawings, photographs, half-tone pictures from the illustrated journals or daily papers, etc., as it is to photograph animate or inanimate models. You place them upon a dead-black background, and photograph them in the ordinary way. The negatives thus produced can be utilised in the same manner as the 'ghost' pictures already described. The plate which the fraudulent psychic photographer cleverly changes for your own may already contain one or more latent images of pictures culled from the operator's family album, resurrected from his lumber-room, or they may have first seen the light in a back number of *The Listener*.

The 'grain' or rulings of the half-tone process blocks used by printers for the reproduction of photographs vary considerably,

<sup>1</sup>See *The Coming of the Fairies*, by Arthur Conan Doyle, London, 1922, for some interesting pictures of 'fairies'.

according to the class of work they will be used for. Blocks intended for use in illustrating high-class magazines are made with an extremely fine grain—almost invisible except by means of a magnifying glass. Half-tone blocks as used by the illustrated newspapers, and for printing upon cheap paper, have a coarser grain—caused by the use (during the manufacture of the block) of a screen with a coarser ruling. The structure of the surface of a half-tone process print has been ably illustrated by Professor Jastrow in his popular work on psychology,<sup>1</sup> in which he gives a highly-magnified reproduction of the head of Lord Kelvin which appeared originally in the *Photographic Times*. Viewed at the usual reading distance, nothing is seen but a mass of black and white squares. Seen at a distance of twelve feet or more, the head becomes clearly recognisable.

I have made this slight digression in order to point out to the reader that any negative of a half-tone illustration, if reasonably sharp and clear, must contain the peculiar dot formation inseparable from the half-tone process, unless the original has been faked as hereafter described. Placed under the microscope, and viewed with a one-quarter or one-half inch objective, the portion of the negative representing the copied process print will resemble a chess-board. It is for this reason that pictures taken from half-tone illustrations and fraudulently represented as psychic 'extras' are seldom 'sharp'; there is usually a certain amount of fuzziness which often conceals the origin of the photograph, as the dots, being out of focus, blend into one harmonious whole. Sometimes the photographic faker will go over the original half-tone copy with a stick of fairly soft wax. This operation smudges the pictures a little, as the wax combines with the grease in the printing ink and tends to obliterate the dots of the half-tone. But the faker has a still more subtle use for his stick of wax, and I am not sure that I am wise in

<sup>1</sup>See *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, by Joseph Jastrow, Boston and New York, 1901.

giving this particular secret away. But as it is only by knowing his tricks that we can circumvent the machinations of the fraudulent medium, I will include it in this chapter. Also, the reader will be able to amuse himself in trying the experiment.

Take a piece of hard, glazed white note-paper, and rub over it, as evenly as possible, a stick of fairly soft wax—a hard wax candle (white) will serve. Having your waxed paper, select the half-tone or line drawing that you want to copy, and place your waxed paper, wax downwards, on the drawing or half-tone newspaper illustration. Then rub the back of the note-paper with the rounded side of a spoon or similar smooth object, placing the whole on a hard surface. When thoroughly rubbed all over, peel off the note-paper, on which will be found a perfect copy (transfer) of the half-tone photograph, which will not be damaged. Slightly warm your paper and the picture is then 'fixed'. The faker now photographs this transfer, and in the resultant negative no trace of the incriminating 'dots' will be found. This method also has the merit that half-tone photographs can be copied without removing the originals, such as those to be found in public libraries, museums, etc. The fact that this method reverses your picture does not usually matter; if it does, then your waxed picture can be transferred to another waxed paper, using the same method. If the wax is melted and a little olive oil is added, the mixture, when cold, will be found a better reproducing medium than the plain wax.

What is true of the half-tone process picture applies in a lesser degree to the ordinary photographic print, as the paper or card upon which the negative has been printed has a grain—more or less apparent—which is apt to be exaggerated in the copying process as used by the dishonest medium unless the lighting of the picture has been carefully considered and arranged. If the paper upon which the photograph has been printed has an appreciable grain, and a side light has been used when being copied, it is obvious that the grain will be accentuated.

ated as each tiny hillock comprising the surface of the paper will be lighted upon one side only: the side away from the source of illumination will be in shadow. The photographic copy will appear to have a much coarser texture than the original, as the grain has been exaggerated by the uneven lighting. The sun's illumination of the moon serves as a good example of what I mean. Full and new moon occur respectively when the sun and moon are aligned oppositely. The full moon then appears 'flat' when viewed through a telescope, as it receives a front light. At quadratures the moon appears half-illuminated or 'dichotomised'. It is then that the mountain ranges and craters (such as the Lunar Apennines) cast long shadows and are in brilliant contrast, owing to the more oblique incidence of light.

It is apparent, then, that to avoid an unpleasant surface, photographs must have a front lighting when being copied by the camera. Albumenused paper and some of the photographic printing papers coated with collodion—which is highly transparent and structureless—show very little grain. Other printing papers prepared from a coarser stock show a distinctly granular surface. It is always wise to carefully examine with a powerful lens the alleged supernormal 'extra' upon the *negative* (for preference) or print. A grain can frequently be seen, clearly denoting its fraudulent origin. In some of the alleged 'spirit' pictures I have seen, the *edges* of the added 'extras' have been plainly visible—proving that the original photograph has been roughly cut round with a pair of scissors, and simply copied against a black background. In one glaring case which came under my notice, *two* such pictures, which overlapped slightly, had been photographed together and 'introduced' into the same photograph. The shadow cast by the edge of the upper picture, where it overlapped the lower, was patent to all. Many 'psychic' photographers have had the technical knowledge necessary to introduce fraudulently an 'extra' into a photograph, but have



'Spirit' photographs of (left to right) Sir Vincent Callard, Lady Callard and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Note cut-out effect of heads, and 'cotton-wool' clouds.





not had enough artistic taste or ability to make a pleasing picture. On the other hand, I have seen alleged spirit pictures where there has been direct evidence of the use of the air-brush and India ink, and the result has been too beautiful to be convincing. A mistake which is often made by the unskilled—and thoughtless—faker is for the sitter and 'extra' to be lighted from opposite directions—an inconsistency which is both ludicrous and inartistic at the same time, though some sitters do not appear to think it strange.

Another inconsistency often found in stereoscopic photographs of materialisations is for the alleged spirit forms to be absolutely flat, whilst the medium or sitters and the accompanying *mise-en-scène* are three-dimensional and stand out in bold relief. Sometimes the drapery of the 'spirit' will exhibit the stereoscopic effect, and the face will be as flat as the proverbial pancake—suggesting that the most important part of the apparition is made of cardboard, upon which has been drawn or photographed the features of a person. Some false mediums use a dummy to represent the spiritual visitor. Mrs. Mellon, the notorious materialising medium who was exposed<sup>1</sup> at Sydney in 1894, was famous for her 'Geordie' and 'Cissie'—two lay figures which were her principal stock-in-trade. When I was at Munich a year or so ago I examined a set of Dr. Baron A. von Schrenck-Notzing's stereoscopic pictures of his experiments with Eva C.,<sup>2</sup> and in every case the materialised heads, figures, etc., were quite flat and looked as if they were cut out of stiff paper. It is very doubtful if these 'spirits' were supernatural, and the inconsistency of the stereograms was most marked.

Another way of printing an image upon a sensitised plate is

<sup>1</sup>See *Spookland*, by T. Shekelton Henry, Sydney, N.S.W., 1894. An American edition was published in Chicago in 1902. Cf. also *A Counterblast to Spookland; or, Glimpses of the Marvellous*, by 'Psyche', Sydney, 1894.

<sup>2</sup>See *Materialisations-Phänomene*, by Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, München, 1914, afterwards translated and published as *Phenomena of Materialisation*, London, 1920.

by means of an enlarging lantern or reducing apparatus. This method offers no particular advantage to the fraudulent operator, and it is very doubtful whether any medium would use it to-day. The modern spurious 'psychic' photographer has more subtle means of cheating the credulous, and requests, nay, almost insists, that his client bring his own plates. In the following pages the reader will learn how science has come to the aid of the fraudulent photographic juggler who claims to be able to portray, by means of the camera, the spirits of the relatives of his deluded victims.

One afternoon in January 1921 I was waiting for a train at Paddington Station and I got into conversation with a man who was neither more nor less than a spirit photographer's mechanic. He did not know I was interested in psychic matters and became very confidential. During our talk he showed me the most perfect piece of apparatus for adding an 'extra' to a negative that I have ever seen. It was made of ivory, and small enough to be palmed in the hand. He called it the 'Ghost Stamp'. In the lower part could be placed a tiny positive, the upper portion containing an electric pea-lamp and miniature battery. The lightest contact with the sensitised surface—or back—of a plate printed a perfect vignettted 'extra' on the emulsion, as the slight pressure closed the electric circuit, lit the lamp and illuminated the positive. I have described and illustrated the 'Ghost Stamp' elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> so will refer the reader to my detailed explanation, should he feel disposed to make one for himself.

I saw the 'Ghost Stamp' in 1921, and, clever as it was, it has been quite superseded by a tiny piece of apparatus invented by Mr. C. P. MacCarthy, the honorary secretary of a Sheffield spiritualist society. Mr. MacCarthy constructed his little gadget

<sup>1</sup>This apparatus is minutely described and illustrated in an article, 'Psychic Photography', by Harry Price, *Journal of the American S.P.R.*, New York, Oct. 1925, pp. 582-7.

for the sole purpose of demonstrating that, under apparently rigid test conditions, it is possible to print an 'extra' on the sitter's own plate.

Mr. MacCarthy demonstrated his apparatus at a lecture he gave in London on June 26, 1935. During the meeting, he offered to undergo a stringent test, and I will now quote from the report of the lecture which appeared in *Light* for July 4, 1935:

'Mr. MacCarthy offered to produce "extras" under any test conditions which a special committee cared to impose, and his challenge was accepted. Conditions were imposed which appeared to make faking impossible. These included the purchase by the committee of the photographic plates, which Mr. MacCarthy was not allowed to touch during the whole of the proceedings; the use of a camera and slide obtained direct from a dealer's stock and operated by a professional photographer; searching before the sitting for concealed apparatus; and, as a final precaution, that Mr. MacCarthy must submit to be handcuffed during the proceedings.

'All these conditions Mr. MacCarthy accepted; and yet five "extras" were produced, and the faces on three of them were "recognised" by the sitters.

'Explaining the means by which this apparently impossible result was achieved, Mr. MacCarthy said they were partly psychological and partly scientific. To begin with, he searched for old photographs bearing some resemblance to certain members of the committee. Two of these—Mrs. W. E. Gladstone and Mr. Ben Tillet—were duly "recognised" when they appeared as "extras", as the mother and relative, respectively, of two of the sitters. Another photograph used was that of a soldier friend of his (Mr. MacCarthy's) father, whom—by adroit suggestion—he induced his father to ask for.

'Coming to the means by which the "extras" were actually produced on the plates, Mr. MacCarthy said they included very

careful preparation and much practice in getting them in the desired positions. The basis of his plan was the use of ultra-violet rays, invisible to the human eye. After choosing the photographs, etc., to be reproduced as "extras", he made micro-photographs (in which all essential details were preserved in a space no larger than a pin-head) and mounted these—five of them—in a specially prepared ultra-violet projector about the size of his little finger.

'Although he was searched before the sitting, this projector was not found—where it was hidden was part of the secret which he did not yet wish to reveal; and although he was handcuffed, he experienced no difficulty in using the projector in the dark-room, his method being to make some remark and point his finger—and the projector, which was attached under his finger by a ring—at the plates at a distance of about 18 inches.'

From Mr. MacCarthy's experiment<sup>1</sup> it will be seen how utterly hopeless it is for the ordinary person to attempt to combat the machinations of a fraudulent 'spirit' photographer. Mr. MacCarthy could not have staged his very convincing test had he not had some considerable knowledge of photography, optics, electricity, chemistry and conjuring. If he had turned his ultra-violet light projector to dishonest uses, he could have made a fortune out of the credulous fools who flock to 'spirit' photographers. Although Mr. MacCarthy used ultra-violet rays in his experiments, the invisible infra-red also could have been employed, though not perhaps in the same projector.

It is not every professional photographic 'medium' who has the necessary skill or knowledge to use ultra-violet light or infra-red rays in faking his plates. But there are many other ways in which plates can be affected, thus producing some alleged psychic marking or semblance to a face.

The sensitised coating of a photographic plate is extremely

<sup>1</sup>For a complete illustrated explanation of Mr. MacCarthy's methods, see *Psychic Science*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Oct. 1935.

delicate, the silver emulsion of which it is composed registering upon its surface the faintest actinic ray, emanating from whatever source. It is affected by many chemicals, gas fumes, acid vapours, radio-active substances, infra-red, ultra-violet and X-rays, radiant heat, etc. The uncapped camera placed at an open window during a thunderstorm at night records the lightning flash as surely and as faithfully as it does the portrait in the studio: and this extreme sensitiveness is utilised in many subtle ways by the fraudulent spirit photographer who deceives his clients with spurious 'spirit' pictures.

We have seen in the first part of this chapter how it is possible, by means of a double exposure or double printing, to get an 'extra' upon the finished picture; but it is most unlikely that the modern photographic faker would resort to such crude and obsolete methods, which have been exposed over and over again in books and magazine articles. The really up-to-date psychic photographer makes a great point of utilising *your* plates, marked for preference at the time of the sitting. If he does not do this, you can consider him suspect from the very start. Moss made the initial mistake of refusing to use any but his own plates, and of course was always regarded with suspicion. As the modern dishonest photographic medium is practically compelled by public opinion to use the sitter's plates, the whole of his energies are directed towards the production of figures or markings upon the plates which cannot be accounted for by normal means. He likes to show you the plate complete with 'extra', dripping wet, straight from the fixing-bath, as he seems to think that this display of 'honesty' on his part is a guarantee that no trickery has been resorted to in the production of the negative. Rarely does the investigator find that the negative or print has been faked or tampered with—detection would be so *very* easy, and there are so many ways of tampering with the *extremely delicate sensitised coating* of the plate before its ultimate arrival in the final bath. I will enumerate some of

them, leaving the question of the utilisation of radio-active substances until later.

One of the very easiest—and least known—methods of getting cloud-like forms or peculiar markings upon a photographic plate is to use an unevenly mixed developer. The reader can easily try the following experiment: take a heavy, concentrated, one-solution developer such as Rodinal or Azol, to mention only two of several brands on the market. Pour about one hundred minims of the reagent into a four-ounce graduated measure. Add *gradually* four ounces of water, letting it gently trickle down the inside of the glass. It will be found that the two liquids—owing to the difference in specific gravity—will not mix, the heavier chemical remaining at the bottom of the vessel. If the contents of the measure are now poured slowly over the exposed sensitised plate, without rocking the dish, it will be found that whereas the image will slowly develop, cloud-like markings, of greater density, will make their appearance upon the plate—due to the uneven action of the developer. These markings, which sometimes assume very curious formations, will of course be plainly visible in the finished print. An unscrupulous medium will assert that these marks are due to spirit agency, and will endeavour to point out their resemblance to human faces or inanimate objects. With a little imagination you will fancy you see 'something' and go away more or less impressed. It is not possible to produce a portrait by this method (unless by accident), though these shadowy forms can be manufactured right under the noses of the investigators. When no question of individual identity is involved, but merely that of recognition of an attempt at the human face, any three random marks that are not too far apart or too divergent in size will, of course, gain such recognition; the more so if one talks about 'first attempts', 'the early stages of materialisation', etc. That is why one sees 'faces' in the pattern of the carpet, in a figured wall-

paper, in photographs of trees or foliage, or amongst the cinders of a glowing coal fire. With the unevenly mixed developer method, the 'psychic' can utilise his client's own marked plates and apparatus and even his own dark-room—provided the mixing of the developer is left to the medium, as is often the case. In a similar way, by the use of a camel's hair or sable brush dipped in the concentrated developer, forms can be painted upon the sensitised emulsion that are indistinguishable from some of the alleged psychic 'extras' palmed off on the uninitiated. The mere fact of not rocking the dish during the process of development of a plate will produce curious markings due to the uneven action of the reagent. Similar markings can be produced by uneven fixing.

Another and still more subtle way of producing weird forms upon the sensitised plate under strict 'test' conditions is for the dishonest medium surreptitiously to drop a small crystal (not much larger than a pin's head) of sodium thiosulphate (hypo-sulphite of soda, or 'hypo') upon the plate during the process of development. The crystal slowly dissolves, forming an irregular circular patch of varying intensity, removing by its action the silver salts in the emulsion which have not been affected by the light. The investigator's own plates can be used, and the finished print will show the markings. Sulphocyanide of ammonium, sulphite of soda, cyanide of potassium, and sulphocyanide of potassium can be used in place of the 'hypo'. The cyanide of potassium is particularly active as a solvent, and its effect in a given time is correspondingly greater.

Still another way of producing 'extras' upon the sensitised surface of a photographic plate is by means of the glowing end of a lighted cigarette. It is quite possible for the fraudulent photographer to produce some semblance to a head and shoulders by the cigarette process, for the light emanations can be directed as surely as the artist's brush or Mr. MacCarthy's ultra-violet ray projector. Obviously, this method is not pos-



sible if the investigator is standing over the medium, but the former's marked plates can be used.

I have shown how simple it is by means of a crystal of hypo-sulphite of soda to produce 'spirit' formations upon a sensitised plate. It is even easier to produce similar markings by dipping a finger into the 'hypo' and, with a circular motion, rubbing it upon the emulsion. Finger-marks show very plainly upon the gelatine surface of photographic plates. Even a perfectly clean finger rubbed upon the plate prior to its immersion in the developer will, owing to the natural greasiness of the skin, produce markings in the finished negative. I heard of one man who specialised in producing abnormal markings (which he said were caused by 'human radiations') in his clients' own dark-rooms. These he produced by the simple expedient of running his fingers through his greasy hair and, unseen by the observers, rubbing them upon the sensitised surface of the plates. This astute gentleman used to vary the process by concealing chemicals in his hair and using them as circumstances dictated.

It is quite possible to get markings upon unexposed plates by wrapping them up for a week or so (time depends upon the age of the journal used) in an illustrated newspaper or journal. Try the experiment of wrapping up a fairly fast plate in a page of illustrations culled from *The Listener*, and putting it by for a few weeks. You will find, upon development, a faithful reproduction of the picture or print with which the sensitised surface was in contact. This curious fact is due to three causes, *viz.* (1) the deterioration of the sensitised emulsion, which is more rapid where the blank (unprinted) paper was touching, owing to the preservative qualities of the grease in the printing ink; (2) certain chemical actions set up by the printing ink; (3) the absorption by the gelatine of a certain amount of moisture from that portion of the paper which is not printed on. Where the plate has absorbed any of the grease in the printing ink, it

will be found that this has the effect of delaying the action of the developer over those portions of the plate which have been in contact with the ink. It would be possible to produce a 'spirit' picture in this way—using your own plates, of course, or 'substituting'.

Another and extremely subtle method of producing recognisable portraits upon the investigator's own marked plates, whilst he is actually standing over you in his own dark-room, is known as the 'backed plate' method, and the trick was explained to me by the 'Ghost Stamp' gentleman. The pseudo-medium first suggests to his dupe that he should use his (the sitter's) own marked fast plates, 'backed for preference, as it precludes any false images due to halation'. He then photographs his sitter with his (the investigator's) own camera, in his own studio. They then go to the investigator's own dark-room, and the owner stands over him whilst he develops the plate. (As a matter of fact, a clever operator could let the investigator develop the plate and still get his 'extra' on.) Having developed the plate, the 'medium' (or investigator) fixes it, and, taking it to the light, the victim is astounded to find an 'extra', with fair detail and not so clear and sharp as to appear suspicious, looking over his left shoulder.

The secret of this 'miracle' is as subtle as it is simple, providing the 'medium' can do a very little sleight of hand. He first of all obtains a small film positive, about three-quarters of an inch in diameter. He then takes the photograph of the sitter in the ordinary way—care being taken to leave room for the 'extra' on one side of the sitter's head. Now, it is well known that most of the 'backing' used on photographic plates is made of powdered burnt sienna, gum arabic, glycerine and water—which is easily soluble in the developer, which it discolours. The faker then takes the plate (or the investigator can do this) and puts it in the developer for a few moments. He then takes it out again and, under the pretence of seeing if the image is

appearing, holds it up to the dark-room lamp—a perfectly natural proceeding. By this means the 'medium' is enabled to see the position of the sitter on the plate. Noting this, with the middle finger of the left hand he surreptitiously rubs away a portion of the backing at the spot where he wants his 'extra' to appear, making a circle rather less in diameter than that of his little positive film. He returns the plate to the dish, and, securing his film positive, retains it unseen between the fingers of his left hand. He again has a look at the plate to 'see how it is getting on', and slips his little film on the back of the plate at the spot he has prepared for it. It will be quite unnoticed and will remain in position by suction till it is removed. Now for the perfect subtlety.

It is not generally known that not one dark-room lamp in a hundred is 'safe'. Take a fast plate (one of a speed of about 1000 to 1500 H. & D.), place three coins upon it and expose it for two or three minutes to the light of an ordinary dark-room lamp. Upon development, the places where the coins were will be quite white and clear, but the surrounding portions of the negative will develop up black, showing that the red light has fogged it. Hold up a small spectroscop to the red light, and you will find that a wide band of the spectrum, embracing perhaps some of the blue-violet, blue, yellow and orange lines, will be visible. A perfectly 'safe' light will show only a very narrow band in the red end of the spectrum. In the act of constantly holding up the plate to the dark-room lamp to 'view progress', the 'red' light (which I have shown is not wholly red) is printing (*i.e.* fogging) the faker's 'extra' upon the portion of the plate assigned to it. The duration of the exposure required to do this is governed by the speed of the plate, the density of the 'extra', and the quality (*i.e.* the amount of light, other than red, that the lamp passes) of the dark-room lamp. The backing prevents the remainder of the plate from being fogged, at the same time nicely vignetting off the portion filled by the 'extra'.

When the little positive disc has been printed sufficiently, it is slid off into the now discoloured developer, where it is quite invisible. The faker either pours the whole contents of the dish down the sink or obtains possession of it while the investigator is going into ecstasies over the wonderful result. My informant told me he had never known this trick to fail, and said that one of the best-known 'spirit' photographers in America used it frequently. Backed plates are not imperative for this very subtle deception, but they produce better contrast between the normal picture and the 'extra'. On one occasion, he told me, he submitted to a most severe test. He was searched, stripped, made to change his clothes and work in the dark-room of a local photographic society under constant supervision. He was even subjected to a medical examination, which, as it transpired, was singularly incomplete. They never took their eyes off the plate from the time the packet was opened till it came out of the fixing-bath. 'But I fooled them all the same,' he said, 'and I will tell you how I did it. The little disc (the gelatine of which has been hardened by means of a formalin bath) I secreted under the loose skin of the *glans penis* (the prepuce), and recovered it at a favourable opportunity.' To my query as to whether this trick had ever been published, he replied in the negative; but said he adapted it from an idea suggested in an old number of a German technical paper.<sup>1</sup>

It is also possible to produce blurred forms upon backed plates by scraping away the backing with the finger-nail in the act of removing the plates from the dark-slide, and exposing, as already explained, to the 'unsafe' dark-room lamp. The backing afterwards dissolves in the developer, thus removing all traces of the trick. If the investigator takes care that the red screen of the dark-room lamp has been made reasonably 'safe' by paper or gelatine stained with a mixture of methyl violet, tartrazine and crocein scarlet, the plate would require much longer

<sup>1</sup> Probably the Berlin *Berichte der Deutschen Chemischen Gesellschaft*.

exposure before an 'extra' could be printed on in the way I have explained. Some 'spirit' photographers request their sitters to bring fast plates, and frequently ask them to purchase plates of a particular brand. They can therefore set up a certain standard to work by, and make their calculations accordingly, reducing the risk of failure to a minimum.

Although it is customary for the 'spirit' photographer to allow his sitter to develop (or watch the development of) the exposed plates, it sometimes happens that the after-manipulation of the plates is left to the medium, in which case the opportunities for fraud are unlimited. I cannot understand a serious investigator allowing the medium to touch the plates in any way, but I admit that in the case of a lady, whose knowledge of photography is perhaps *nil*, the temptation to 'leave it to the medium' is not to be resisted—so I will describe a few further ways in which an alleged psychic 'extra' can be added to a genuinely-exposed plate.

We will assume that the investigator has brought his own marked plates. In the first place, any external marking can be duplicated upon a substituted plate in the privacy of the dark-room. Signatures can be forged; diamond writings or marks can be imitated with ease; scratchings upon the film side of the plate can be copied, etc., etc. What cannot be duplicated so easily are the X-ray identity marks, which I originated when I had my sitting with William Hope,<sup>1</sup> and now extensively used. Whether the plate be marked or not, the fraudulent medium has many dodges by which he can make an 'extra' appear on any plate supplied to him.

An easy way of adding an alleged 'spirit' photograph to a plate is by means of a small positive, placed on the glass or film side (according to the degree of sharpness desired) of the plate, and exposing the positive (only) to a white light for a second. This method is similar to the trick already described, but accom-

<sup>1</sup>See *Cold Light on Spiritualistic 'Phenomena'*, *op. cit.*

plished under more comfortable conditions. Or, should he know the type of 'spirit' his client desires, he can get an artist to draw the portrait of the wanted one on tracing-cloth, tracing-paper, tissue paper, greaseproof paper, or *papier-mineral*. This forms the necessary positive, and is used in the way I have already described. I am informed that old cinematograph films of celebrities (or nonentities) are cut up and the single pictures used to print 'extras' upon sitters' plates. The fact that a blurred picture of, for instance, the late W. E. Gladstone is suggested by the medium as a speaking likeness of his client's great grandfather (who had side-whiskers and a long white beard at the time of his demise) is not regarded as strange by the average 'spirit' photograph hunter. Tracing-paper or cloth lends itself admirably to the manufacture of spurious 'spirit' photographs. A clever artist can simulate a photograph with his pencil and air-brush that defies detection when it is reduced and projected, suitably blurred or out of focus, by means of a low-powered microscope and lantern upon a photographic plate. The fuzzy pictures are frequently 'recognised' by too enthusiastic or over-credulous investigators who are seeking to prove the *post-mortem* existence of their friends and relatives.

Another simple way of producing weird forms upon a plate is by the 'stencil method'. A sketch of the figure required is drawn the correct size upon the bottom of a plate box (usually made of cardboard) and cut out with a sharp knife, like a stencil. The cut edges are then serrated in order that the shadow cast upon the plate shall not be too sharply defined. A thin piece of tissue paper (in order to diffuse the light) is now pasted over the aperture in the box bottom, and upon the paper are stuck tiny bits of cardboard to represent the eyes, mouth, hair, etc. By the judicious application of pieces of different thicknesses, shadings and half-tones can be shown with little trouble. Some very clever positives can be produced

by this method,<sup>1</sup> which is useful where the 'psychic' is unwilling or unable to employ an artist. When the 'positive' is finished, the plate is merely dropped into the box (in the dark-room of course), the lid of the box replaced, and the bottom of the box exposed for a fraction of a second to an electric pocket torch (or lighted match), taking care that the light is kept moving during the period of the exposure so that no hard outlines are caused by the shadow of the stencil. Upon development of the plate, a first-class 'extra' will be seen, especially if a little ingenuity has been expended upon the fashioning of the cardboard stencil, with papers of varying degrees of opacity.

Another trick, well-known to American 'psychic' photographers, is to paint or draw an 'extra' upon the emulsion of the plate (before exposure) with thin opaque yellow pigment. This is done previously in the dark-room and, upon exposure, the yellow paint obstructs the light rays falling upon that portion of the film so treated, reproducing, when developed, a faithful replica of the drawing. It is impossible, without close examination, to discover the fraud in the red light of the dark-room, as the yellow pigment matches the yellow silver emulsion. The only drawback to this method, I am told (I have not tried it personally), is the objectionable sharpness of the 'spirit' due to the clear-cut edges of the drawing. This defect could be overcome by a clever artist, or the faker could paint his 'extra' upon the *glass* side of the plate and expose this side in the camera. Whether the film or glass side be worked upon, the pigment, composed of sugar, water, gum arabic, glycerine and a yellow dye, dissolves in the developer. Sometimes a piece of yellow tissue paper (cut to the requisite shape) is pasted on the back of a plate; in this case, the plate is exposed from the glass side. To prevent the texture of the paper showing in the final

<sup>1</sup>The author has seen some embossed porcelain plaques which, when held up to the light, have the appearance of beautiful photographs, owing to the gradations in the thickness of the paste.

photograph, it is soaked in a mixture of xylol, Canada balsam and oil of cloves, which makes it practically grainless.

Another dodge, supposed to have been used by Keeler in America some years ago, is to use children's coloured transfers, as sold in sheets, to represent the 'extras' on a photographic plate. A suitable head or figure would be cut from the sheet and transferred to its appointed position on the glass side of the plate. When the transfer paper was removed, and the plate exposed in the usual way (except that the glass side was towards the lens), a perfect, though somewhat blurred, reproduction of the transfer would, upon development, be plainly visible. The various colours of the transfer would have the effect of stopping more or less light from affecting the sensitive emulsion of the film. The portion of the film immediately behind the most actinic colours, such as violet, indigo, blue and green, would be more affected during exposure than that part of the film subjected to the rays from the yellow, orange and red. Consequently, an image of varying intensity, very like a photograph, would be the result. I have tried this method and must admit it has great possibilities. The transfer washes off when placed in the developer, removing all traces of the trick. A variant of this fraud is to paste a small piece of tissue paper upon the glass side of the negative and to work upon it with pencil or stump, producing any sort of figure that cannot be copied from a photograph or secured in any other way. The tissue paper is 'cleared' with the xylol and Canada balsam mixture. Other transparent substances, such as gold-beater's skin, gelatine, cellophane, parchment, waxed tissue, thin celluloid, etc., can be used, but the paper is easier to work on, owing to the superior 'bite' obtainable upon its surface. I have seen some clever and elaborate drawings upon tissue paper which would be eminently suitable for the purpose.

Another dodge, also supposed to have been used by Keeler, was to obtain 'extras' upon the sensitised plate by means of a



bright image reflected through his studio window into the lens of his camera. He is alleged to have cut 'heads' out of bright tin-foil, pasted them on boards covered with dead-black paper, and hung them at a suitable angle outside his studio window. I have tried this method, and find it is quite easy to reflect the image of the foil a considerable distance if a bright light is employed, as the black paper absorbs the light and the polished foil reflects a perfect image of the head. The lens of the camera collects the projected rays and transfers them (much reduced) to the sensitised plate in the usual manner.

In the Keeler tin-foil method the figures are of course visible, though screened from the gaze of the casual observer. But I see no reason why the same results should not be obtained by means of the 'magic' bronze mirrors of Japan. Professor Silvanus P. Thompson, the famous English physicist, in his popular book on light<sup>1</sup> gives two illustrations of a Japanese 'magic mirror' and the image reflected upon the wall by the polished front face. There is nothing to be seen upon this highly-polished silvered surface, and yet a reflection from it gives an accurate copy of the image or design cast upon the back. Professor Thompson says: 'Here<sup>2</sup> is one of these beautiful Japanese mirrors, round, heavy, and furnished with a metal handle. One face has been polished with care and hard labour; the other has upon it in relief the ornament cast in the mould—in this case the crest of the Imperial family, the Kiri leaf (the leaf of the *Paullonia imperiales*), with the flower-buds appearing over it. The polished face is very slightly convex; but on looking into it . . . you would see nothing of the ornament on the back. It is merely—so far as you or the former owner of the mirror is concerned—a mirror.

'But now take this mirror and hold it in the light of the sun, or in the beams of an electric lamp, and let it reflect a patch of

<sup>1</sup>*Light, Visible and Invisible*, by Silvanus P. Thompson, London, 1897.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* Fig. 35, p. 50.

light upon the white wall, or upon a screen. What do you see? Why, in the patch of light reflected from the front of the mirror, you see<sup>1</sup> the pattern that is on the back. This is the extraordinary "magic" property that has made these mirrors so celebrated. . . . For many years it was supposed that these mirrors were produced by some trick. But the extraordinary fact was discovered by Professor Ayrton in Japan that the Japanese themselves were unaware of the magic property of the mirrors. It results, in fact, from an accident in manufacture. Not all Japanese mirrors show the property; those that show it best are generally thin and with a slight convex face. It was demonstrated by Professor Ayrton, and I have since accumulated other proofs, that the effect is due to extremely slight inequalities of curvature of surface. These arise accidentally in the process of polishing. The mirrors are cast in moulds. To polish their faces they are laid down on their backs by the workman who scrapes them violently with a blunt iron tool, using great force. During this process they become slightly convex. The polishing is completed by scouring with charcoal and scrubbing with paper, after which they are "silvered" by application of an amalgam of tin and mercury. Now during the violent scraping with the iron tool the mirror bends, but the thin parts yield more under the pressure than the thick parts do; hence the thick parts get worn away rather more than the thin parts, and remain relatively concave, or at least less convex.'

It is obvious then, from Professor Thompson's experiments, that it is possible to project an image, the source of which is quite invisible to the naked eye, by the reflected light from a brass plate on which is nothing visible. The images thus projected can be registered on a photographic plate and palmed off on the unwary as a psychic 'extra'. The innocent-looking vase on the mantelshelf of the medium's studio, the framed mirror on the wall, or the polished rotundity of the 'antique' copper

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.* Fig. 36.

coal scuttle may be secretly printing the picture of someone's great-grandmother upon the photographic plate in the medium's camera. If any reader of these *Confessions* imagines that this last suggested method of fraudulently introducing an 'extra' is far-fetched, I can only reply that the idea has possibilities that cannot be overlooked by the serious and conscientious investigator.

I hope the reader has now begun to realise the number and diversity of the ways of introducing spurious images into a *bonâ-fide* photograph. I do not assert for one moment that all these methods are in use to-day; in fact, it is doubtful whether many of them are known to the average photographic medium—he is often too ignorant. But there is no reason why the investigator should not suddenly stumble across one of the dodges mentioned in this chapter, which if it has been read with care should prove of value to him. But the real purpose of this monograph is to make the psychic student *think*; he will then be prepared. He may meet with variants of the methods described. Not every fraudulent medium possesses a 'Ghost Stamp', but he could work a similar trick by means of a very small folding camera with an electric bulb inside, the positive of the required 'extra' taking the place of the usual ground-glass focusing-screen.

Though I have given particulars of several methods of obtaining fraudulent psychic pictures, these apply merely to the manipulation of the plate either before or after the legitimate exposure. Some of these methods are well-known, others are not, and all are simple compared to the trick apparatus that could be devised to defraud the over-credulous.

I have sometimes been asked if the photographic fakers ever use living models for the production of their 'extras'. It has been done, of course, but the method is far too risky to become popular. The fraudulent medium who would risk the use of living models would be 'given away'—or blackmailed—sooner

or later. Where fake psychic 'extras' are concerned it is clearly a case of 'dead men tell no tales'. China heads (dolls' heads make excellent models), dolls, clay figures and wooden images have all been utilised by the faker when it suited his purpose. Barbers' wax lay figures, with their carmine cheeks, flowing golden tresses, blue eyes as big as saucers, and with mouths like Cupid's bow, make extremely good-looking models for the faker who has a taste for colour. 'Extras' of these models, produced by any of the numerous colour processes, look exceedingly pretty. Those I have seen looked like a bevy of charming maidens who had made a special trip from Elysium in order to pose before the 'psychic' photographer's camera. Buguet, the early Parisian exponent of 'psychic' photography, commenced using the pictures of living persons for his 'extras',<sup>1</sup> and went to prison in consequence. If he had stuck to the old family album, all would have been well.

We have already seen how very easy it is to fake a plate before or after it has been exposed. I will now draw attention to some pieces of trick apparatus designed to 'help out' the phenomena.

Frederick A. Hudson, a clever and artistic 'spirit' photographer who flourished in the latter part of last century, is popularly supposed to have used the first trick camera. He was frequently exposed.<sup>2</sup> Though most of Hudson's photographs were produced by the double exposure method, upon occasion he would use an ingenious camera which, I am informed, was made by Howell, a famous London maker of mahogany conjuring apparatus.<sup>3</sup> This camera, of the old square wooden type

<sup>1</sup>For examples of Buguet's work, see *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, *op. cit.*, Plate XVII.

<sup>2</sup>See *Encyclopædia of Psychic Science*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>The author possesses an ingenious mechanical stool made by Howell which was used by the famous American physical medium, Annie Eva Fay.

used in those days, contained a light metal frame which, in its normal position in the interior of the camera, rested upon the bottom of the smaller of the two telescopic portions of which the camera was constructed. This frame was used to hold a waxed paper positive upon which was the desired full-form 'extra'. The simple movement of pushing in the dark-slide actuated a lever which raised this frame from a horizontal to a vertical position, taking with it the positive, which was thus placed in contact with the photographic plate. The withdrawal of the slide would of course restore the positive and its frame to its normal position—the whole falling back by its own weight. Upon exposing the sensitised plate, the 'extra' would be automatically printed on the plate at the same time as the image of the sitter was being registered. Upon development, both sitter and 'extra' would appear simultaneously, the opacity of the 'spirit' depending upon the density of the image in the paper positive. A great number (fifty-four) of Hudson's pictures are well reproduced in a book<sup>1</sup> by Miss Georgina Houghton, a dear old lady (who ought really to have been in a home) who visited Hudson's studio no fewer than two hundred and fifty times between March 1872 and January 1877. All of Hudson's pictures in this book show distinct traces of double exposure, and each ghostly visitant is nicely placed against a dark background where it would show up to the best advantage. But we will not waste too much time over Georgina and the rascal who so long deceived her, as the beliefs of the one, and the methods of the other, are alike obsolete. Miss Houghton's book is to-day regarded as one of the curiosities of psychic literature.

I do not intend to give detailed explanations of all the trick apparatus that could be constructed for the purpose of registering a 'psychic extra'—I should require a volume as large as these *Confessions*. But I will indicate in what directions the investigator should look if he intends making a systematic

<sup>1</sup>*Chronicles of Spirit Photography*, by Georgina Houghton, London, 1882.

examination of the apparatus and dark-room intended for the experiments.

Having thoroughly examined the camera (no easy matter, by the way), attention should be turned to the dark-slides or plate-holders. It is possible that in one of these is a shutter or trap, which could be opened to admit a projected image thrown from the pocket, dark-room lamp, window, etc., and so well made that it can be discovered only by the closest scrutiny. Or the dark-slide might have a 'flap' arrangement which hides a duplicate prepared plate which could be substituted for the sitter's. All sorts of things can be done with a camera lens. A microphotograph<sup>1</sup> could be placed between the components of a lens and the image thrown upon the plate. This method might answer with a short focus lens, but I doubt if it is feasible with one of long focus. Or the microphotograph could be cemented in a pin-hole in the camera bellows, lens mount or Waterhouse stop. And what could be easier than mounting a small positive in the aperture of a Waterhouse stop, and, on presence of changing the stop, introducing the mounted positive, thus turning the camera into a daylight enlarging lantern? Or the positive could be set in a small tube in the dark-room lamp. As a matter of fact, I once did this experimentally by mounting a tiny positive in front of a small lens set in a tube at the side of the lamp. I found that a perfect image of my positive, about three-fourths of an inch square, was projected. It would have been an easy matter to receive the image upon a sensitised plate. Other trick dark-room lamps could easily be devised. Then there are trick developing dishes—black *papier maché* dishes in which a glass-protected positive is set in the bottom. When the rapid plate is in the dish, and the latter is held near

<sup>1</sup>A transparent tiny photograph, about one millimetre square, which must be looked at through an enlarging lens of some sort. Not to be confused with a photomicrograph, which is a picture of a microscopic object, made by pointing a camera through a microscope and giving an enlarged view of the object without further manipulation.

the 'unsafe' dark-room lamp, an image will be printed on the fast emulsion. The 'window' in the black developing dish will escape notice. Then there are the common glass developing dishes which could be placed over a trap on bench or sink, and an 'extra' surreptitiously printed in this way.

If there can be trickery in the dark-room, there can also be trickery in the studio or room where the photographs are taken. There can be trap-doors, projected images, a mirror behind the sitter which is reflecting another person or model suitably screened, faked backgrounds through which the 'spirit' (the faker's assistant) pokes his head, or in which is a trap, opened at the moment of exposure, revealing a dummy who duly appears on the negative.

In the gentle art of substitution there is unlimited scope for a smart man—or woman—and I have never yet come across a photographic 'psychic' who was not either very intelligent or very cunning. Dark-slides are as easy to manipulate and handle as slates, and as for the number of tricks with slates<sup>1</sup>—their name is legion. It is not only possible to substitute a dark-slide during the course of the experiment, but (with so many modern cameras identical in appearance) quite easy to substitute the camera as well! Packets of plates, portions of contents of boxes (plates are usually packed in fours or sixes), single plates, wrappers (afterwards marked), empty boxes—all can be exchanged or 'switched' by the photographic juggler. Ringing the changes, usually accomplished by misdirection, is the sheet anchor of the fraudulent 'spirit' photographer who specialises in using his sitters' plates.

Confederacy must be taken into account by the serious investigator, and steps taken that it cannot enter into any of his experiments. Fraudulent 'psychics' have been known to photo-

<sup>1</sup>See *Spirit Slate Writing and Kindred Phenomena*, by William Ellsworth Robinson ('Chung Ling Soo'), New York and London, 1899. Contains all the principal slate tricks as used by mediums.

graph photographers' shop windows and show-cases in order to get photos of recently-deceased persons who lived in the same town as the sitter. Servants have supplied copies of photographs sought by mediums for dishonest purposes, and I was once told of a case where a window-cleaner—in the course of his employment—'snapped' an oil-painting in a third-floor apartment; the portrait, somewhat faked, appearing eventually as a recognised 'extra' on a sitter's own plate. In this last case was used rather a clever subtlety. The lady who was having the test took her own plates, and saw them put in the dark-slide in the dark-room. She then thought about marking them, so, taking a small piece of stamp-paper from her hand-bag, she stuck it on the dark-slide and initialled it. When the plates came to be developed, she confirmed her initials on the slide, and was delighted to find a beautiful 'extra' (of the oil painting) on one of the plates. She never failed to tell her friends about the 'perfect test'. What she did *not* tell them was the fact that the medium, following her out of the dark-room, transferred the *still wet* stamp-paper from the first dark-slide to one containing the 'extra' which he had in readiness. The investigation of alleged supernormal photographs is really a battle of wits.

It is not very likely that the reader will ever come across a 'spirit' photographer clever enough, or rich enough, to employ expensive apparatus involving the use of X-rays, infra-red rays, or ultra-violet light. But as psychic 'extras' *can* be impressed on a sensitised emulsion by these methods, this chapter would not be nearly complete if I did not make some reference to them.

I employed the X-ray markings in my experiment with Hope, and the idea has been very largely copied. But X-rays can be used illegitimately, as well as legitimately, and it would be quite easy to produce a semblance to a face on a fast plate in the developing dish by having suitable apparatus under the dark-room bench, the rays being formed into the required design by the use of lead stencils or lead paint. Ultra-violet



images (quite invisible to the eye) can be projected, as we have seen, on to a photographic plate if the faker is clever enough to make the necessary apparatus.

If X-rays, infra-red rays and ultra-violet light can be considered as outside the range of the ordinary commercial 'psychic' photographer, radio-active salts and substances have, I am certain, been used in the production of fraudulent 'extras'.<sup>1</sup> Abnormal markings can be produced on plates by painting radio-active sulphide of zinc on the inside of the camera bellows, or on the inside of the flap of a dark-slide. Figures painted on a plate wrapper will be faithfully reproduced on the plate if the two are allowed to be in contact for some time. A painting of a face or other design, executed in the radio-active paint, and pasted in the interior of a dark-slide, will reproduce itself on the plate. If a sheet of black paper is pasted over the painting, it will hide the latter and only slightly prolong the time necessary to produce an image on the emulsion. A tin-foil stencil, cut to any design, and backed by a sheet of the radio-active paper, and let in the thickness of the wooden dark-slide, would eventually affect the plate contained in the slide—the stencil and paint being invisible, of course. This experiment cannot be done with the ordinary luminous paint or fluorescent sulphide of zinc, which require continual excitation (exposing to a strong light) in order to exhibit their luminous properties. The sulphide of zinc used must contain some bromide of radium, mesothorium, or similar substance. Radio-active substances can be distinguished by examining with a strong magnifying-glass in the dark. If really radio-active (and not merely fluorescent), the electrons will be seen being discharged from the substance like a brilliant rocket display.

Mr. J. Malcolm Bird, formerly associate editor of the

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Fred Barlow, in the *Journal* of the London S.P.R. for July 1933, reproduces some excellent 'spirit extras' which he made upon a photographic plate by means of luminous paint.

*Scientific American*, described<sup>1</sup> in that journal an experiment with Father C. M. de Heredia, a well-known conjurer and investigator, in which the latter undertook to transfer a luminous 'extra' on to a plate, employing the ordinary zinc sulphide which requires excitation immediately before use. Mr. Bird says that 'Father de Heredia's sleight of hand was crude, so that two of three observers were completely aware of what he did, how and when he did it, and his procedure fell far short of his claims of duplicating that employed in any photographic *séance*-room. But photographically, his trick was a complete success.

'He used a newspaper half-tone, coated with zinc sulphide. He activated it by standing with his back to a large window, hand behind back, luminous-painted picture in palm, for a minute or two. He got it on the plate by insisting, in his rôle of "psychic photographer", on signing the glass negative immediately after I had signed it, which I had done while he was engaged in activating his "plant". In signing, he placed his cupped left hand over the plate while writing with his right; the luminous subject for his "spirit extra" was in this left hand the while. The time afforded by his slow writing of a rather long signature was ample to produce, on development, a fairly satisfactory "extra". The temporary presence of a bright electric light, or even the use of a flashlight, would be alternatives as regards the execution of the first step, where daylight was not sufficiently available; the prompt sequence of the second step would usually involve the greater *finesse*. The incident emphasises that the slightest move by the psychic photographer to touch the plates or even to go too near them, invalidates the result so far as the scientific viewpoint is concerned.'

The effect of radio-active salts on a sensitised plate can be very easily perceived if the reader will place his luminous watch, face downwards, on an unexposed plate in the dark-room. If

<sup>1</sup>See *Scientific American*, New York, for June 1923, p. 380.

after a short time the plate is developed, the figures on the watch will be quite visible in the negative. An ordinary gas mantle (which contains radio-active compounds) will produce the same effect, and so will many other substances, including several ores and minerals. A bottle of radio-active sulphide of zinc, placed near a stack of plates in a photographic dealer's stock-room, will certainly affect some of the plates in the immediate vicinity; and if the reader should ever find an unusual marking on a plate, it would be as well for him to ascertain from the shopman whether the plates have been near any radio-active substances.

As an example of the penetrating power of radio-active minerals, I am reproducing opposite a print from a photographic plate affected by the minerals, thorium, uranium and pitchblende. The experiment was as follows: a new box of  $\frac{1}{2}$ -plates, with a speed of 250 H. & D., was purchased, and without opening the wrappers or touching in any way, was placed on the dark-room bench. A number of pieces of minerals, containing elements of high atomic weight, were then placed on top of the packet and left for nineteen days, care being taken that the box was not disturbed. The minerals used were (a) a large piece of Joachimsthal (Bohemia) pitchblende; (b) a piece of thorium; (c) a small piece of uranium nitrate; (d) a portion of Cornish pitchblende. Upon development, the top plate was found to have been much affected by the minerals. The pitchblende caused markings in which, with a little imagination, can be seen 'faces' and other objects. The thorium and uranium minerals were not so effective. Uranium is a metallic constituent of pitchblende. Thorium being also a metal, the oxide of which is used in the manufacture of incandescent mantles, that is why the emanations from a gas mantle will affect a photographic plate. Thorium and uranium are—with radium itself—the chief radio-active elements, the emanations from which may be rendered visible by means of a sensitive phosphorescent



Effect of radio-active minerals on sensitised silver emulsion in an unopened box of photographic plates. The markings were caused by (a) Joachimsthal pitchblende; (b) thorium; (c) crystal of uranium nitrate; (d) Cornish pitchblende.



screen. Pitchblende is the most important radio-active mineral; others are autunite, monazite, thorite, carnotite, etc.

The remaining plates in the box were affected to a slight extent. It would be possible to affect the top plate only, if the minerals were applied for a much shorter duration, and each plate were wrapped separately—like some brands of pan-chromatic or X-ray plates. It would also be very easy, by interposing lead stencils (cut in shape of heads with apertures for eyes, nose, etc.), to produce some sort of 'faces' on the sensitised surfaces in an unopened box of photographic plates.

Speaking of X-ray plates reminds me that a method of obtaining 'extras' on a photographic plate was suggested to me by Dr. Warner Collins. A stencil of a face or a 'message', cut out of a piece of sheet lead, is placed over an empty X-ray *cassette* containing the usual two intensifying screens: the whole is then exposed to the X-rays. The stencil is then removed. If any photographic plate or film is placed in contact with the *cassette* (which, of course, can be thoroughly examined) within three hours of the X-raying, the image will be perfectly reproduced on the sensitised emulsion and will, of course, develop up in the usual way. This phenomenon—which Dr. Collins has tested—is due to a 'lag' on the part of the rays, and the method has immense possibilities for the fraudulent 'spirit photographer'.

Having now revealed to the reader many of the tricks employed by the dishonest medium, I will now tell him how to circumvent them. The reader may argue that, though impressed with my account of the possibilities of faking, it would be quite useless for him to attempt to experiment with a spirit photographer, as he would not know where to begin in order to safeguard himself against the many frauds I have described. But if he has studied the previous chapter on how to test a medium, he will know that his salvation lies in *control*.

First of all, order some  $\frac{1}{2}$ -plates direct from the manufac-

turers (such as Ilford, Ltd.) and ask them to X-ray upon each some sort of design. This design is, of course, latent and invisible until it reveals itself in the developing dish. Order each plate to be wrapped separately. Request that the packet be sent to you per registered post, and, when the parcel arrives, put it in your safe, unopened, until just before the experiment.

Then select your camera, which, for preference, should be a simple  $\frac{1}{4}$ -plate wooden stand camera on the usual tripod. With it you should use wooden dark-slides, in preference to the many forms of metal plate holders. A cheap lens will suffice; one working at f. 8 is quite suitable, and fast enough for the work you intend doing. A black focusing cloth completes the outfit.

Make an appointment with the photographic medium and insist that he comes to your house. You will cut out a good deal of hocus-pocus by making this your first condition.

Before the arrival of the medium, prepare a room by removing all ornaments, hangings, furniture, etc., except a couple of plain wooden chairs. Have a cheerful fire burning in order to warm the room. Select another room for your studio, and clear it of all unnecessary furniture and ornaments. If you intend developing the plates yourself (as you should), you will also want a dark-room, which should contain no object except what is absolutely necessary for the development and fixing of the plates.

When the medium arrives, usher him into the empty room. He should be greeted by two of your medical friends. Then invite the medium to remove his clothes and submit himself to a medical examination. If he is genuine and has nothing to hide, he will cheerfully consent to this vital fore-control. There is nothing degrading or undignified about it and an honest medium will submit to this very necessary and reasonable examination in the interests of science. If the man is fraudulent and has something to hide, he will refuse. In that case, send him home.

We will assume that the medium enters into the spirit of your experiment and consents to be examined. As he removes his clothes, take them out of the room and place in another apartment—one to which the medium will not be admitted until the end of the test. Lock the door and put the key in your pocket.

Your two medical friends will now examine the medium, and this fore-control should be thorough. See that all body orifices are explored, paying particular attention to mouth, teeth, nails of hand and feet (and between the toes), prepuce, etc. The medical examination completed, the man should be conducted by two persons (each holding a hand) to the bathroom. If he really possesses some power of producing a super-normal picture on a photographic plate, he will cheerfully consent to the hot bath which you have prepared for him. This particular control is necessary in case some chemical has been painted on any part of his body—to be used if opportunity occurs. In any case, his hair must be well washed, and his hands scrubbed.

The 'bathroom control' over, ask the medium to don the black one-piece tricot tights which are in readiness. These garments can be purchased, ready-made, at the theatrical costumiers. Conduct the medium (still with hands held) to the studio. If you are an expert photographer, I suggest your recording the remainder of the proceedings with a slow-motion cinematograph camera, which should register every action of the medium.

Everything in the studio should be in readiness: camera set up, dark-slides filled, chairs in position. Do not allow the medium to touch anything nor permit him to approach within six feet of the camera. If he insists that physical contact with the camera is necessary, permit him to place his hands on the camera for a few seconds only, keeping him under the closest observation. On no account allow him to insert or withdraw dark-slides or focusing screen, or to tamper with the lens or



camera in any way. Seat the person to be photographed (I suggest one of your medical observers) on the chair, focus him yourself, and withdraw the slide. Cover with focusing cloth.

The photograph is now ready to be taken. If you are using a fast brand of plate (anything over 1000 H. & D.) the exposure should be about five seconds in a well-lighted room, with a lens aperture of f. 8. But you will find the correct exposure only by experiment. Remove the cap yourself, make the exposure, replace the cap, and the photograph is taken.

Having secured the photograph or photographs, the medium should be sent home. Escort him to the room containing his clothes. When he has dressed, pay him his fee and promise to let him know the result of the experiment.

When the medium has left the house, carefully develop and fix the plates, using a really 'safe' light, which can be purchased from a reputable photographic dealer. Use Rodinal developer (simple and non-staining), which should be thoroughly mixed with the right amount of water. Pour the developer in one sweep over the plate and rock until the image is fully developed. The first thing you will probably notice is that the X-ray control mark is developing, the sitter and background appearing more slowly. If, in addition to the normal images on the plate, a 'spirit' face appears, you can congratulate yourself that the experiment has been successful, and it will form the basis for further tests with more plates, films, and perhaps stereoscopic and slow-motion cinematograph cameras. Fix the negatives well and wash them thoroughly. If you have conscientiously followed my advice re the control of the medium and apparatus, and an 'extra' is produced under these conditions, I should very much like to know the name of the medium.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For further examples of the methods of 'spirit' photographers, the reader should consult *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-26, and 'Psychic Photography: Some Scientific Aids to Spurious Phenomena', by Harry Price, two articles in the *Journal of the American S.P.R.* for October and November 1925. (Vol. XIX, Nos. 10 and 11.)

## XII. Convincing Experiments with a French Clairvoyante

During a visit to Paris a few years ago, I was invited to give two lantern lectures on Eleonore Zugun and the Schneider boys. During my stay a friend kindly gave me an opportunity of experimenting with a new French *clairvoyante*, Mlle. Jeanne Laplace, the latest star to appear above the French psychic horizon.

When I first met her, Mlle. Laplace was a young French lady in the early twenties, of attractive appearance, and I was informed that her psychic faculties became apparent soon after her fiancé was killed somewhere in the French lines during the Great War. She told me that immediately news was received of his death she got a message from him at a *séance* by means of raps on a small table they were using. They were experimenting at table-turning. Up to this period Mlle. Laplace had taken little interest in psychic matters, but the experience I have recorded led her to experiment with the ouija board and other mechanical contrivances with considerable success. She then realised that she possessed the faculty of *clairvoyance* or, as Professor Richet would term it, *cryptesthesia* to a very high degree. Her powers were brought to the notice of my friend who, at the time of my experiences with the young lady, had arranged a series of experiments with her at his house.

There was no previous arrangement that I should have a sitting with Mlle. Laplace. After luncheon at my friend's house on Saturday, January 29, 1927, it was casually mentioned to me that the medium would be coming in the afternoon and that my host would like me to see her. It was arranged that I should

speak no word to her, and my friend undertook not to introduce me or mention my name in any way.

In order to be scrupulously fair to Mlle. Laplace and the reader I will record the fact that the medium must have known of my presence in Paris. My lectures had been extensively advertised in the French Press, and as a frequent visitor to my friend's house she could hardly fail to have become cognisant of the arrangements which were being made for my visit. Granting this much, and the fact that she was moving in French psychic circles, she must also have known about me and my work.

At four o'clock on Saturday, January 29, my friend ushered me into his drawing-room, where I found Mlle. Laplace seated in an arm-chair waiting for her next visitor. My host's young daughter was seated at a small table with a stenographic machine at which she is very proficient. She said to the medium: 'Will you kindly give this gentleman a sitting?' I did not speak a word.

I must here interpolate that the moment I entered the room I was convinced that the psychic knew my name, nationality, my business in Paris and other details of my life which are common property among persons interested in psychical research: being an intelligent girl, she *must* have known these things. And I was prepared to discount many of her remarks in consequence.

I seated myself before her, at the same time that my friend left the room. The psychic had hardly commenced her remarks—all of which were recorded verbatim—when my host returned with my left-hand glove which he had found on the hall table. He handed the glove to Mlle. Laplace who, it transpired, much prefers to handle something belonging to the sitter during the *séance*, in the manner of psychometrists. I want to emphasise the fact that it was my friend who thought of, and procured the glove; I was previously unaware of the fact that

the psychic required a personal article belonging to the sitter. My host then left us.

I will not weary the reader with the complete verbatim notes of my sitting, and this chapter never would have been written if my experiences with this psychic had ended with what she told me about myself. Also, my modesty would prevent my giving a recital of all the nice things she said about me! Many of her remarks require the test of time in order to gauge the truth of them. I am to go to India, and Cairo, and Russia, and make a number of other 'enjoyable journeys'. She 'sensed a connection' between myself and America, Norway and Sweden. The American connections must have been known to her, as I was then Foreign Research Officer to the American Society for Psychical Research. She could not have been aware of the fact that in a few weeks I was due to lecture at Copenhagen and Oslo. I had 'great intuition—almost mediumistic' and I was 'always making researches, with always the desire to make more experiments'. My presence in Paris told her as much. Many other statements about my character, life, health, etc., were given; but I do not think I am doing Mlle. Laplace an injustice when I say that all these points could have been gleaned from what she must have known of me and from the fact that she was in personal contact with me for more than an hour. 1928 was to have been a good year for me.

However, I must record one brilliant 'hit' which Mlle. Laplace made. She said—I am referring to the verbatim notes—'Sometimes you are sad; you are dwelling on the ineffaceable past. You are always thinking of someone and trying to bring back the past; this revival of the past is often in your thoughts. You are suffering from insomnia. . . .' This statement was absolutely and peculiarly true. For more than a month I had been worried over a certain matter and had lost much sleep in consequence. The fact that I was 'dwelling on the ineffaceable past' was literally correct. Worry and insomnia are usually strangers

to me, but at the time of my visit to Paris I was suffering from both in an acute form. Another statement she made was to the effect that 'a grandmother was a second mother to you'. This is correct, my mother having died when young, *her* mother more or less taking the place of my maternal parent.

Like a certain historic egg, the results of my *séance* with Mlle. Laplace were 'good in parts'. I now come to the brilliant portion of this psychic's performance and the *raison d'être* of this particular chapter.

After I had thanked Mlle. Laplace for her endeavours on my behalf, I asked her if she would give me her impression of the original of a photograph which I had in my pocket-book. She said she would try. I opened my pocket-book and from amongst about twenty others I extracted at random a small unmounted photograph of a young girl. The size of the photograph was three inches by two and bore no writing or marks of any kind. The photograph was of a young girl who was seventeen years of age when the picture—full face—was taken. As a matter of fact, the original of the picture looked younger than her years when the photograph was secured and might easily have been judged to be not more than fifteen years old. There was nothing in the photograph to denote the nationality of the sitter: it was just a plain full-face photograph of a young girl of, apparently, fifteen or sixteen years old.

I handed the photograph of the girl to Mlle. Laplace without comment and did not utter a word during the period when her 'impressions' were being recorded on the stenographing machine. The following verbatim notes are from the record which my friend kindly sent me, and from some additional impressions concerning the picture which the psychic afterwards gave me. I must add that the original of the photograph was quite unknown to anyone in Paris, and it was purely a fortuitous circumstance that I happened to have the portrait in my pocket:

1. I sense a connection between the original of this photograph and your glove which I have just handled.
2. There is a great bond of friendship between the original of this photograph and yourself—perhaps a family connection. I sense that you have a great affection (*une grande tendresse familiale*) for this young girl.
3. She is remarkably endowed as a musician.
4. Very fine physique, fresh peach-bloom complexion, and very beautiful eyes. Fair hair.
5. Was delicate in childhood.
6. Nervous disposition, but calm in emergency and evenly balanced mentally.
7. Has a strong character; makes up her mind quickly, and does not make friends with everybody.
8. Very fond of travelling, and has travelled extensively on the Continent.
9. I hear coughing—a little lung trouble, but nothing serious.
10. Is very intuitive, and very energetic. Is sympathetic; very loving to those around her; fond of reading and studying. All persons who come in contact with her think she is a charming young lady. Could never be unkind; is never uncharitable; has always a kind word for everyone and readily forgives those who would injure her.
11. This person will travel extensively (*sortir dans le monde*) I get the names Rolf—Walton—Walter.
12. Very determined nature and obstinate when a useful object can be achieved thereby; very thoughtful for others.
13. Her tastes are very artistic and she is interested in art—likes quietness.
14. She is fond of movement and social distractions, but I 'sense' a nature that loves peace and tranquillity, and she sometimes likes to be alone. A happy disposition, sweet but firm.
15. Has had a serious illness in her life. The danger from it has passed.

214 *Convincing Experiments with a French Clairvoyante*

16. She is to beware of fire and things connected with fire.

17. She easily sprains her limbs and has weak ankles. She often has a slight cough. It would not surprise me if she is ill this winter.

18. This young girl has a particular affection for her father.

19. She is English and her name is Mary. I again get an M . . . , another name commencing with M. She is twenty-one years old.

20. Her future will be happy (*une vie agréable*).

21. She is living in the country, and has recently changed her residence.

22. Her father has—or had—some secret trouble.

23. I get the name Clark.

24. Her heart is rather weak—it is not serious.

25. All the time I am seeing 'Mary' or 'Marguerite'.

26. By her marriage she will improve her station in life and have a good position (*une très jolie situation*)—later a residence in the country and a flat (*appartement*) in a city where there are very beautiful monuments.

27. The Côte d'Azur is marked out for this person; she will travel in the South of France.

28. She will probably visit America.

29. I see the discarnate entity of a person, whose name contained a sound like 'ness', continually with her. This person has recently died.

30. Fond of personal ornaments, jewellery and pretty clothes.

31. Educated in a town away from her home (boarding school).

32. 1928 will be a good year for her.

33. Especially fond of dogs.

34. She is to beware of a false man who limps.

\* \* \* \* \*

The name of the original of the photograph which I handed to Mlle. Laplace was Miss Mollie F. I will refer to her as Mollie,

and will take Mlle. Laplace's impressions in the same way as recorded, and will arrange my comments and explanations in the same numerical order:

1. This is absolutely correct, Mollie having presented me with the gloves for a birthday gift twelve months previously.

2. This is correct. Not a family connection but a great bond of affection exists between Mollie, her family, and myself. I regarded their house as a second home.

3. Mollie is not 'endowed' as a musician, but is intensely devoted to music and her home is filled with musical instruments, some of which she plays.

4. An accurate description of Mollie, but the 'beautiful eyes' and 'fair hair' can be deduced from the photograph.

5. No; just the usual infantile ailments.

6. This 'impression' is true to life, except that her friends do not regard Mollie as having a 'nervous disposition'.

7. An accurate impression of the young girl.

8. This is absolutely correct. She has travelled extensively in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Holland.

9. No signs of lung affection and is never troubled with coughing.

10. The impressions given in No. 10 very accurately describe Mollie's character and disposition, though at least some of these attributes could be claimed by the modern cultured young lady.

11. Though in all probability Mollie will travel, the names 'Rolf—Walton—Walter' have so far had no special meaning for her or her friends, though she has had acquaintances with these names.

12. This is an accurate description of a number of traits in Mollie's character.

13. Mollie is very artistic in her dress, tastes, etc., but the reference to 'art' has a much deeper significance. Her father, Mr. F., is the head of a large company of fine art publishers, and



Mollie herself was connected with a firm which deals in works of art and who are publishers of etchings, etc.

14. A true description of Mollie's tastes, pursuits and disposition. She is particularly fond of dancing and motoring, though not perhaps more so than the average modern girl in the same social position.

15. Incorrect. She has had no serious illness.

16. This, of course, is unanswerable; she has experienced no danger from fire up to the time of writing.

17. Mollie has weak ankles, but is never troubled with coughing. She was not ill during the winter of 1927.

18. This impression is peculiarly correct. Though all normal girls love their fathers, there is an exceptional bond of affection between Mollie and Mr. F.

19. Though I have known the F. family intimately for so long, it was not until I started checking Mlle. Laplace's statements that I discovered that Mollie's baptismal name is Mary. 'Another name beginning with M' is obviously 'Mollie'. I consider this a brilliant 'hit'. Mollie was twenty-one years old in October 1926; the reader will remember that she did not look more than sixteen in her photograph.

20. The conditions of Mollie's life pointed to a happy future, and she married a year or so after the experiment here recorded. The fact that she is English could, I think, be deduced from the photograph itself, as her face is undoubtedly that of a typical, young, cultured English girl.

21. That she lives in the country is correct; also the fact that her people moved into a new residence eight months previously.

22. When I asked Mollie if her father had any 'secret trouble' she answered in the negative; certainly none of the family knew anything about it. When I asked Mr. F. himself he admitted that some time ago he was medically examined and his heart was found to be affected. Nothing immediately serious, but serious enough for him to decide not to mention the

heart trouble to his family in case it should unduly alarm them. The 'secret trouble' is thus well established.

23. Dr. Clark is the name of the medical adviser to the F. family: a good 'hit'.

24. Mollie has not a particularly strong heart, but nothing at all serious. 'Impressions' 22, 23 and 24 should, I think, be taken together, as we get in conjunction a positive case of heart disease, a 'secret trouble' and the correct name of the doctor attending the F. family—a really brilliant sequence.

25. 'Marguerite' has no special meaning for her.

26. I have already stated that Mollie married. It cannot be said that so far she has 'improved her station in life'. But she has a 'residence in the country', though the *appartement* 'in a city' has not yet materialised.

27. The Côte d'Azur is a particularly pleasant spot in Mollie's opinion, but she has not yet visited this part of France.

28. At the time of the experiment there was some probability that Mollie would visit the United States.

29. When Mlle. Laplace pronounced the word 'ness', I at first thought she said 'net' and that is what I put down in my notes. I should add that this name was given to me at the conclusion of the sitting. When I arrived in England I asked Mollie if she had recently lost any relative or friend whose name contained a syllable which sounded like 'ness'. She could think of no one. Shortly after I met Mr. F. and asked him if his daughter had recently lost a relative whose name contained a sound like 'ness'. He hesitated a moment and then said, 'Why, yes, it must be Mollie's godmother who died last summer.' Now Mollie had always thought of her godmother under the name McGregor. But this name was assumed by deed poll early in the Great War. Her husband's name was Steinitz, which was altered to McGregor under pressure of public opinion, which regarded the holder of a Germanic name with deep suspicion. Though Mollie knew of the change of name,

she had forgotten what the original name was, and always thought of her godmother and her husband as the McGregors. 'Net', 'ness' and 'nitz' are so very similar that one can hardly doubt that Mlle. Laplace really did sense part of the name of Mollie's deceased friend, who was very fond of her godchild. The fact that the person sensed had 'recently died' is confirmation of the fact that Mollie's godmother was the person indicated in the psychic's very curious 'impression'.

30. Every normal modern young girl is fond of pretty clothes, jewellery, etc., and Mollie is no exception.

31. This statement is correct; Mollie was educated at a girl's public school many miles from her home.

32. The year 1928 was not particularly beneficial for her.

33. Mollie is especially fond of dogs, and this answer is peculiarly correct.

34. The only 'man who limps' among her acquaintances is her dentist: she promised to beware of him!

If the reader will carefully compare Mlle. Laplace's 'impressions' with the facts as related by me, I think he will agree that the psychic succeeded in demonstrating a very brilliant example of clairvoyance, lucidity, or *cryptesthesia*—call it what we will. From the small photograph (bust only) of an unknown person she was successful in determining the Christian name, age, personal appearance, character, disposition, temperament and even the weaknesses of the original. The name of the family doctor and the 'secret trouble' of the father are fine examples of her extraordinary faculty. That she did not get these impressions from me by telepathy is proved by the fact that I did not know that the subject's baptismal name was Mary; nor did I know anything of the 'secret trouble' of the father, or the name of the family doctor. Also, the Steinitz incident was absolutely unknown to me; and the fact of the 'weak ankles' was quite outside my knowledge.

Eighteen months after my experiment with Mlle. Jeanne Laplace I was again lecturing in Paris and took the opportunity of having a further sitting with her. I found that her powers had developed considerably and that she was much surer of herself when giving 'impressions', which came quicker. She also hesitated less in describing what she 'saw'.

My *séance* with Mlle. Laplace was arranged for three o'clock in the afternoon of July 7, 1928, and was held in my friend's house in the Avenue Niel. My host's sister-in-law took all the notes, the translation of which forms this report. Mlle. Laplace knows no English, but speaks French with a very clear intonation and there is little ambiguity about her utterances.

The note-taker, Mlle. Laplace and I seated ourselves in the form of an equilateral triangle, the sides of which measured about nine feet. I stipulated that I should say nothing and that the psychic should not ask questions; it is recognised that an astute person can glean quite a lot of information by judicious 'pumping'.

Mlle. Laplace does not go into trance during these experiments in tactile clairvoyance (psychometry), and she undergoes no apparent change during these tests. She boasts no 'spirit guide', 'control', or 'trance personality'; her impressions are delivered in the course of what is very like a friendly chat.

I had purposely prepared no tests for Mlle. Laplace. In the first place, I was uncertain whether the experiments would take the form of psychometric readings or whether she would describe the scenes she clairvoyantly visualised. Secondly, I did not want to load my mind with any pre-arranged ideas as to how we should conduct the *séance* in order to lessen, if possible, the part that telepathy might play in the experiments. After a number of successful tests I was asked to hand the psychic one more object, and she said she would describe the mental impressions and scenes that the article inspired.

In the right inside breast pocket of my coat were a number of

letters, documents, etc., and at random I plunged my hand in the pocket and drew forth the first paper with which it came in contact. It was a letter from Dr. R. J. Tillyard, F.R.S. The letter was sent from Canada; it was dated June 6, 1928; and was typewritten upon the embossed notepaper of the hotel 'Château Frontenac', Quebec. It was of an azure blue colour, and *folded* measured five inches by three and one-quarter inches. It was written on the front *inside* surface only, and folded with the blank sheet outwards.

I removed the letter from the envelope, being very careful that the psychic did not get a glimpse of the latter. I handed her the letter, on which nothing was visible to show whether it was written, typewritten, or printed. Mlle. Laplace could get no clues from the letter unless she opened it.

The psychic immediately recorded the following impressions:

1. The writer is coming from a country of the sun.
2. Beyrout or a port; America. I see a boat.
3. A fortunate and rich person with an agreeable life.
4. A gentleman.
5. The letter crossed the sea.
6. Switzerland is mixed up in it, and Mexico.
7. Capital letters like P or O.
8. Not a relative of the sitter's.
9. Comes from America, South or North.
10. I again get the countries, Spain, Mexico, Switzerland.
11. Person very tall.
12. I get the word *Rebec*.
13. Is not in good health.
14. Is old already.
15. A big business man.
16. I see a station with a lot of trains.
17. Is very sympathetic.
18. But violent when passionate and could then kill someone.

19. Two persons prepared letter—one, a secretary, has touched it.
20. Letter is typewritten.
21. Was written in a hotel.
22. Writer of German or American origin.
23. The writer will die through a railroad or automobile accident; wheels or rails are bad for him.
24. He will be in a country where there are a lot of insects and will be stung.
25. He is occupied with spiritualism.
26. He is a doctor and a scientist.
27. He lost a lot of money because he is too honest.
28. He has opportunities for success in politics.
29. I see 'Richard' written.
30. He has not a long life to live—not very many years.
31. I see a capital B.
32. I see the word 'Margaret'.
33. I see a crest like a crown or coronet.
34. Not in good health.
35. Arterio-sclerosis is indicated.
36. Has suffered a lot.
37. A widower.
38. Has children—daughters—feminine influence is great.
39. Not very lucky; unhappy events in life.
40. I see boats—trading boats—connections with spiritualists.
41. A writer; writes for journals.
42. His legs not quite normal; wears spectacles.
43. I see a nice dog near him.
44. I get the capital L.
45. Not always understood.
46. Has suffered in his youth; has had great struggles—a moral struggle.
47. Is mediumistic.
48. I get the name 'Jack'.

222 *Convincing Experiments with a French Clairvoyante*

49. Will have a tragic death—congestion of the brain and will fall on railway or under car.

At this juncture the psychic paused and for the first time I spoke to her. I asked her where the writer was then living. She replied:

50. In London now.

51. He has connections in America and England and visits a lot of hotels. I then put another leading question. I said, 'What is the writer's name?' The psychic said:

52. I get the name 'Steering'.

53. His real home is where the houses are high, and many industries.

Two distinct mental visualisations appear to be mixed up in the above record. One is that Dr. Tillyard is a 'big business man' and we get the impressions of 'trading ships', 'success in politics', 'the loss of much money', 'big buildings', etc. The other parallel and true impression is that the writer of the letter is a scientist and doctor who writes for journals and who is interested in spiritualism. This is very curious.

An analysis of the series of impressions reveals the fact that the experiment was successful, though not quite so brilliant as the previous ones. Undoubtedly the medium was getting tired (the *séance* lasted two and a half hours) and the tea interval may have upset conditions somewhat:

1. Correct. Dr. Tillyard had come from Australia, and had journeyed *via* San Francisco, Boston and Quebec.

2. 'America' and many 'boats' are correct; Beyrout seems to be irrelevant.

3. Dr. Tillyard would not describe himself as 'rich', though perhaps 'fortunate'. He leads an 'agreeable life' undoubtedly.

4. Correct.

5. Yes, from Quebec to England.

6. Mexico means nothing to Dr. Tillyard, but he has spent happy times in Switzerland.

7. He went once to Australia on a P. and O. liner.
8. Correct.
9. The writer had just left America.
10. Spain means nothing to him.
11. No.
12. The letters *ebec* are contained in the word Quebec. There is also a suggestion, phonetically, in the word Frontenac; see comment No. 33. An excellent attempt.
13. This is true, unfortunately.
14. Not particularly 'old'.
15. Not in the generally accepted sense. But I should call Dr. Tillyard a good business man.
16. Many of them.
17. Peculiarly apt; has a most sympathetic nature.
18. Doubtful.
19. Yes, Dr. Tillyard travelled with a young man named John Evans, who acted as a sort of secretary. This young fellow was concerned also in the subject matter of Dr. Tillyard's letter.
20. Correct.
21. Correct.
22. No; British, but has twice visited America.
23. These baleful prognostications do not perturb Dr. Tillyard as they are so very infrequently verified: but in July 1914 Dr. Tillyard was in a big railway accident and at least one paper reported him killed.
24. Peculiarly apposite. Dr. R. J. Tillyard, F.R.S., is an eminent biologist and chief entomologist to the Australian Government. His life is spent in dealing with a 'lot of insects' and he probably will be—and has been—'stung' many times.
25. Not 'occupied with', but much interested in, the phenomena of spiritualism and psychical research.
26. Correct. He is both a doctor and a scientist.



224 *Convincing Experiments with a French Clairvoyante*

27. A year or so ago he informed me he had lost a lot of money and he now confesses that it was because he was 'too honest'.

28. Undoubtedly.

29. Has a great friend, Richard, in Switzerland.

30. An insurance company would not call his a 'good life', but two years ago a medical board informed him he was fit enough for a long lease of useful activity.

31. Dr. Tillyard cannot connect, except as the initial of a celebrated Australasian adjective!

32. The word 'Margery' formed part of the text of the letter being psychometrised.

33. The letter bears an embossed coronet—part of the crest of the 'Château Frontenac' hotel. Excellent attempt.

34. See comment No. 13.

35. A correct diagnosis. Dr. Tillyard informs me that he suffers from arterio-sclerosis in the back.

36. In health—yes; and perhaps in other ways.

37. No, his wife is still living.

38. Has four daughters and he admits that his home life is undoubtedly blessed by 'feminine influence'. He has no sons.

39. He would not call himself unlucky. Everybody has 'unhappy events in life', and Dr. Tillyard is not an exception.

40. See comments Nos. 2 and 25.

41. Decidedly. Has 'written for journals' for many years.

42. He wears spectacles. His legs are perfectly normal.

43. He once lost a dog, 'Wallace', of which he was exceedingly fond.

44. Means nothing to him.

45. Like the rest of us!

46. Dr. Tillyard informs me that he has had great struggles incidental to his attaining to eminence in his profession, though now his chief trouble (at any rate in recent years) is his health.

47. Yes, in a minor degree; he is an excellent sitter.

48. Dr. Tillyard's name is John, though he is never called Jack.

49. See comment No. 23.

50. Correct.

51. Correct.

52. Means nothing to him; *phonetically*, it is a little like 'Tillyard'.

53. There are neither 'high houses' nor 'many industries' at Nelson, N.Z., or Canberra, Australia, his 'real homes'. But the psychic may have referred to London, his original home.

Dr. Tillyard has supplied some of the above personal comments to Mlle. Laplace's 'impressions', and permits me freely to publish them. He agrees with me that the psychic's description of himself and his work is an excellent one. A person not possessing this peculiar power of clairvoyance or lucidity would gain little information from a perusal of his letter, if read normally. Not all the facts were known to me, so telepathy is ruled out to a certain extent.

I regret that the science of metapsychics is not advanced sufficiently for me to offer the reader an explanation of the foregoing two brilliant examples of Mlle. Laplace's faculty. One of these days, I suppose, some investigator will stumble upon the laws necessary for the successful and certain repetition of these phenomena, under any prescribed conditions. Until then we must content ourselves with piling up data.

### XIII. Rudi Schneider: the Last Phase

I am continually being asked what has happened to Rudi Schneider. As I brought him to England in 1929 and was responsible for his introduction to British scientists, it is assumed that I am still his confidant in matters psychic. Well, I am not—and for the very best of reasons.

Who is Rudi Schneider? It seems rather ridiculous to put such a question before the reader, but, as there may be some who have no knowledge of this famous Austrian medium, I will give a brief sketch of his history.

I can best describe Rudi as the younger brother of the equally famous Willi Schneider—a youth who, a few years ago, puzzled half the *savants* of Europe. In the Munich *séance*-room of Dr. Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing I have seen a musical-box start and stop of its own volition at word of command—and wind itself up! I have seen a half-formed hand or 'pseudopod' pick up a white handkerchief six times in succession and wave it under a red lamp. I have seen a black psychic stump attach itself to a handkerchief and have a playful tug-of-war with my neighbour. And these miracles—and many others—I have seen over and over again under practically my own conditions, in a room filled with scientists and where, one would imagine, fraud was absolutely out of the question. *And I was invited in order to detect trickery, if it existed!* And all the time the young man (a mere lad of eighteen) responsible for these marvels was in an alleged trance, breathing rapidly, and held by two persons as in a vice. That young man was Willi, the brother of Rudi.<sup>1</sup> Soon after, Willi ceased exercising his psy-

<sup>1</sup>For a full report of these sittings, see 'Convincing Phenomena at Munich', by Harry Price, in *Psyche*, London, April 1923.

chic powers (or lost them) and became a dental surgeon. During the period that Willi was losing his interest in psychics, Rudi was gradually acquiring the mediumistic technique of his brother. Unkind people said that Willi merely taught him the tricks of the trade.<sup>1</sup> We will not discuss that question here, but the fact remains that the phenomena, the *séance* conditions, and the peculiar violent clonic spasms and rapid breathing of the trance were the usual features at *séances* with both boys. Even the same 'spirit' or trance personality, 'Olga', operated through the brothers at different periods.

When Schrenck-Notzing realised that Willi's powers were waning, he turned his attention to the development of Rudi's mediumship and arranged with Karl Krall (of 'Elberfeld horses'<sup>2</sup> fame, and a well-known psychist) that an intensive investigation of the boy should be carried out. But Fate decreed otherwise, and death removed both Krall and Schrenck within a few weeks of each other. This was early in 1929. Almost by the same post that I learnt of Schrenck's death I was offered Krall's magnificent laboratory, and I at once hurried to the Bavarian capital. It was a journey destined to become historical.

It was in March 1929 that I once more found myself in Munich. I discovered that Willi had passed his final dental examination, and that Rudi was still in the capital, more or less undecided as to his future. He was looking for a position as a motor mechanic—his trade. I found him doing odd jobs for an electrician named Amereller. By the kindness of the Frau Baronin von Schrenck-Notzing a test *séance* with Rudi was arranged for me the day after my arrival—the first since Schrenck's death. Of course I knew Rudi well as I had had a number of sittings with him in his home-town of Braunau-

<sup>1</sup>See *Bulletin IV*, National Laboratory of Psychical Research. Plate XXII shows Willi photographed simulating phenomena.

<sup>2</sup>See Maeterlinck's *The Unknown Guest*, London, 1914.

am-Inn, Oberösterreich (also the birthplace of Adolf Hitler): those in 1926 were particularly brilliant.<sup>1</sup>

The test *séance* was to ascertain whether Rudi had lost his mediumship. I found that he had not, and at once invited him to London for some experiments under scientific conditions. He accepted.

Just previous to their deaths, Schrenck and Krall had perfected an electrical system of controlling a medium which was based on an 'electrical arm-chair' which I had invented some years previously. Schrenck's device immobilised the hands and feet of both medium and principal controller. At the first London experiments I extended this electrical system so that the hands and feet of *all the sitters* were also controlled. This was accomplished by every person wearing metallic gloves and socks connected in series with a red six-light indicator which immediately told us whether the chain formation (holding hands) was broken and whether anyone's feet were not in contact with his neighbour's. Rudi's limbs (metal-cased, like the sitters') were part of *four* electrical circuits, so that we could tell instantly whether a hand or foot were free. This electrical control sounds complicated, but actually it was very simple—and fraud-proof. We had to do something of the sort as the sittings were always held in almost complete darkness.

During 1929-30 Rudi gave me two series of sittings which can be described as brilliant. The most varied phenomena were witnessed. Quoting from my book, *Rudi Schneider*,<sup>2</sup> I find that the following alleged supernormal manifestations were witnessed: floating, levitation, and other movements of a coffee table, waste-paper basket, hand-bell, handkerchief, etc.; the tying of knots in handkerchiefs; writing on paper by pseudopod

<sup>1</sup>See my report, 'The Phenomena of Rudi Schneider', in the *Journal of the American S.P.R.*, November 1926.

<sup>2</sup>See *Rudi Schneider: a Scientific Examination of His Mediumship*, by Harry Price, Methuen, London, 1930.

or psychic 'terminal'; shaking of cabinet curtains as if by a violent wind; playing of toy zither in mid-air; raps, knocks, etc.; the production of pseudopods resembling arms, hands, 'child-like form', 'snow-man', etc., all showing volition and, sometimes, intelligence; cold breezes, apparent fall in temperature of cabinet (*outside* of which Rudi usually sits), etc.

It must be admitted that the above list is a formidable one. And I believe that all these phenomena were genuine. The electrical control functioned perfectly and I do not believe it was possible for either Rudi or any person to have produced these manifestations normally, under the conditions. Rudi himself was controlled tactually by two persons in addition to his being connected up to four separate electrical circuits.

I had invited a French investigator to two of the 1929 *séances* and he was so impressed by what he saw that, on my recommendation, he suggested to Rudi that a series of experiments should be held in Paris under his direction. The boy consented and, for fifteen months, spent most of his time in the French capital. The Paris visit, I think, proved fatal to his mediumship.

The chief feature of the French experiments was the use of infra-red rays to guard the object (often a handkerchief) to be operated upon psychically, just as they guarded the treasures at the Persian Exhibition at Burlington House. As regards telekinesis (the supernormal displacement of objects), the French experiments were disappointing, but it was claimed that a wonderful discovery had been made: nothing more or less than that Rudi externalised a certain psychic 'force', 'energy', or 'power' that affected the infra-red rays, and which could be measured. (I am avoiding technicalities.) When the French report was issued, these alleged infra-red absorptions were the sole topic among psychists. The report was packed with graphs and diagrams which looked very impressive—assuming that every precaution had been taken against fraud, mal-observation, and experimental error.

The French report had a curious effect upon me. Why, I asked myself, had I not discovered these alleged psychic emanations—if they existed? Hoping to find an answer to the riddle, I decided to invite Rudi to London again. He accepted, and arrived in February 1932. So for the third time in three years Rudi found himself in my laboratory for a series of experiments.

Since Rudi's last visit to me, the market price of phenomena had advanced considerably. From the modest £3 per week (plus his board and lodging) which we paid him in 1929, the cost had risen in 1932 to £20 per week (including the expenses of his sweetheart, whom he insisted upon bringing with him). This commercialisation of his mediumship contributed, I think, to his downfall—psychically speaking.

For the 1932 series of experiments I decided to revert to the old-fashioned (but still popular) chain formation of sitters and tactual control of the medium. The reason I did this was because I intended using various pieces of new apparatus, including an infra-red ray installation and an electrically-operated automatic camera, which I invented specially to photograph telekinetic movements of objects in complete darkness. As one's hands and feet are completely immobilised when wearing the metallic gloves and socks of the electrical controlling system, one cannot manipulate delicate instruments. Hence my return to the tactual control of the medium for the 1932 experiments.

When I was about to commence the experiments, I had rather a shock. The organiser of the French tests wrote and warned me to be on my guard against a certain person X who had been present at his *séances*. My French friend said that 'if there are no phenomena, X tries to make them'. This was unfortunate, as X insisted upon accompanying the medium to London. But having been put on our guard, we took the necessary precautions. What was much more serious was the fact that there was no mention of the confederate in the French report—

which made the reader wonder if other disturbing facts were omitted.

Rudi stayed with us from February 4 to May 6, 1932. He gave us twenty-seven *séances*. The most varied and—apparently—supernormal phenomena were witnessed, but unfortunately I did not see some of the best of them as they were produced in my absence. The manifestations included levitations of the familiar waste-paper basket; the tying of tight knots in handkerchiefs; movements of the cabinet curtains; playing of the toy zither; ringing of hand-bell; materialisation of what appeared to be a 'small hand' and 'closed-up fist' (not seen by me); the passing round of cigarettes by an alleged spirit hand; the alleged abnormal distribution of violets (provided by a sitter), etc.

The infra-red ray experiments were disappointing. Although with a home-made apparatus we got movements of the needle of the milliammeter, proving that something was interfering with the rays, on a very sensitive professional instrument supplied, and superintended by Messrs. Radiovisor (Parent) Ltd., absolutely nothing was obtained. I came to the conclusion that the results with the home-made infra-red absorption apparatus were due to experimental error.

We did much better with the automatic electrical photographic set-up, which I must explain. I made a small table, the loose top of which was so counterpoised on knife edges that the weight of a handkerchief on one side would just bring it to rest (like a pair of balances). The other side of the counterpoise was fitted with a strip of copper which, when the handkerchief was removed, would cause the table-top to over-balance, coming to rest on another piece of copper, closing an electrical circuit, and firing one or more Vaku-Blitz flash bulbs. As, in the dark, three or more cameras, with their caps removed, were focused on the handkerchief, it is obvious that any displacement of the handkerchief would close the circuit, ignite the bulbs, and auto-



matically photograph the handkerchief, plus whatever was moving it—if photographable.

At two *séances* we secured brilliant photographs of a handkerchief rising in the air or just off the edge of the table. But at the twenty-fifth *séance* on April 28, 1932, I made a discovery which compelled me to alter completely my views concerning Rudi's mediumship, and severely shook my faith in the boy's integrity. At this *séance* we had used the automatic photographic apparatus and, as was my custom, I developed the plates the next morning. By sheer coincidence, just as I was going into the dark-room, Rudi and Mitzi (his fiancée) called and accompanied my secretary and me into the room. They said they would like to see me develop the plates. I developed the three plates in Rudi's presence and when I removed them from the fixing bath I saw immediately what had happened. The pictures revealed the fact that Rudi had managed to free his left arm and put it behind his back. The photographs show it sticking straight out behind him. The handkerchief had been snatched off the counterpoise and dropped behind it. Before Rudi could get his arm into control again, the flash—or rather flashes—ignited and the incident was photographically recorded automatically.

When I confronted Rudi with the evidence, he did not know what to say. His first reaction was that the 'arm' was a spirit one—until I pointed out that the 'spirit' in question was wearing my pyjama jacket, a garment Rudi always donned during a *séance*. I formally charged him with having freed his arm, and suggested his having moved the handkerchief from the counterpoise himself. He made no reply.

These very illuminating photographs proved, of course, that our reverting to the old form of tactual control was a mistake—such a thing could not have happened under the electrical controlling system. I was the principal controller at this unlucky—or lucky—*séance*, and I admitted quite candidly that Rudi had

evaded me. In his trance—real or alleged—Rudi is in a state of constant, and often violent, motion. This, coupled with the clonic movements (so-called), makes it difficult to hold the boy.

We did not use the photographic apparatus again, and Rudi departed for Austria the following week. Curiously enough, the last *séance* (the 26th) which I attended with Rudi was good.

Rudi has been accused of producing spurious phenomena many times, by many persons. In 1924 Professors Meyer and Przibram, of Vienna, accused him of evading control. On April 28, 1933, Professor Przibram wrote me: 'We know that Rudi evaded control at the [Vienna] *séances* and we have no reason to believe that any of the phenomena we saw were of supranormal character.'<sup>1</sup> Dingwall, Vinton, Bird, Prince and Professor von Hofsten of Uppsala have, in turn, accused Rudi of evading control; but it remained for me to produce the first piece of photographic evidence of this manoeuvre.

My report<sup>2</sup> of our 1932 experiments was published early in 1933. During the interval Rudi had again visited London at the invitation of another group and, although staying for three months at a hotel within five minutes' walk of my laboratory, never came near me and did not write. When my report was published, a series of extraordinary happenings occurred. In the first place, Rudi denied all knowledge of the incident of the 'spirit arm'! He said he was not present when I developed the plates showing his evasion of control, and knew nothing about it! This was rather foolish of him, as my secretary was a witness to all that occurred, and on December 28, 1932, he wrote to me and said that he was 'very sad that I must rehabilitate myself after so many experiments'. On March 7, 1933, he wrote

<sup>1</sup>See *Neue Freie Presse*, Feb. 15, 1924; *Neues 8 Uhr Blatt*, Feb. 14, 1924, and *Reichpost*, Feb. 16, 1924. (All published in Vienna.) Translations are printed in *Bulletin V*, National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, 1933.

<sup>2</sup>'An Account of Some Further Experiments with Rudi Schneider: a Minute-by-Minute Record of 27 *Séances*', *Bulletin IV* of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, 1933.

accepting another invitation for some experiments (he did not keep his promise), and added, 'I hope to win again, your complete confidence.'<sup>1</sup>

Another curious result of the publication of my report was the fact that a number of people who previously had taken merely an academic interest in Rudi's phenomena now became actively interested in the boy and his doings. For example, the London Society for Psychical Research arranged a series of sittings which commenced in October 1933, just four and a half years after Rudi's first visit to my laboratory. The sittings were organised as an attempt to confirm the infra-red phenomena alleged to have been produced in Paris, 'to test the alleged telekinetic powers of the medium', etc. The experiments were continued until March 1934.

The result<sup>2</sup> of these London experiments can be summed up in a very few words. Fifty-five sittings were held, *and not a single phenomenon* was witnessed during the six months the boy was under examination. The floating paper basket, the belying curtains, the knots in handkerchiefs, the pseudopods—they waited in vain for them. Not even a supernormal rap was heard. No evidence was secured that he could externalise any psychic 'power' or 'force', and the Paris infra-red absorption claims were not endorsed.<sup>3</sup> Some humorist suggested that I had frightened all the 'power' out of him, but it so happens that *after* he left us in May 1932 he produced for the private London group (in the autumn of 1932) the most spectacular phenomena.<sup>4</sup> This was before those devastating photographs were published. Also, after he left the S.P.R., a few private sittings

<sup>1</sup>For this correspondence, see *Bulletin V* of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, 1933.

<sup>2</sup>See *Proceedings*, S.P.R., Part 137, 1934.

<sup>3</sup>See 'Hat Rudi Schneider in Paris geschwindelt?' by Karl Foltz, in *Unsere Welt*, Leipzig, July 1935. This article is an analysis of the Paris experiments.

<sup>4</sup>See *Proceedings*, S.P.R., Vol. XLI, p. 255 ff.

were held by some of his friends, at which it is claimed that genuine phenomena were witnessed.

One interesting point was settled at the last London sittings. A peculiarity of the Schneider brothers' trance is a very quick and shallow breathing, accompanied by violent clonic spasms. This rapid respiration sometimes reaches two hundred and sixty cycles per minute—or even more. This trance breathing was hailed by the uninitiated as so remarkable—or even supernormal—that a gramophone record was made of it and, very unfortunately, broadcast on two occasions. It remained for Dr. C. G. Douglas, F.R.S., of Oxford, the authority on respiration, to prove that Rudi's trance breathing is absolutely normal, and no indication whatsoever as to the genuineness of the trance. Dr. Douglas collected samples of the medium's breath in Douglas bags and analysed them. (The samples were taken when the boy was in the so-called trance state.) The oxygen consumption corresponded to a man walking four miles per hour. As Rudi is always in violent motion during this alleged trance, this oxygen consumption is in no way excessive. As a matter of fact, several people have since imitated Rudi's trance breathing without difficulty. Rudi's friends had contended that it was impossible for a normal person to duplicate this rapid breathing without going into convulsions. Fortunately, science was able to correct this impression.

Rudi has not visited London since the fiasco of the 1933-4 experiments, and I understand he is now married to Mitzi and has settled down at Weyer in Oberösterreich. It was a sad ending (I refer to the fiasco, not the marriage) to a mediumistic career that, at one time, threatened to make obsolete our textbooks of physics, biology and chemistry. But at present we have no need to revise our views on the nature of these subjects. Just as Willi Schneider and Rudi Schneider acquired the same *séance* technique and produced the same phenomena, so both brothers have come to the same unsatisfactory end. I be-

lieve that both boys have produced genuine phenomena; I am likewise convinced that they have been responsible for the spurious variety. After careful study of my last report, I now doubt whether any of the interesting manifestations we saw in 1932 were genuine. We proved that Rudi could free a hand, and that, of course, makes the whole of his mediumship suspect. But I reiterate that he could *not* free a hand in my 1929-30 experiments. In conclusion, I must acknowledge that I owe the Schneider boys something for having sustained my interest in psychical research over many years; and for so cheerfully submitting themselves to scientific examination under laboratory conditions—conditions invariably refused by the cheap psychic faker.

#### XIV. *New Light on the Abrams 'Magic Box'?*

I am sure that if the late Dr. Albert Abrams could read this chapter he would have a much greater shock than could be got out of his own 'magic box', or any other piece of the weird electrical apparatus devoted to his 'electronic' system of curing diseases by the well-known 'Abrams rays'.

I need not inform readers that the Abrams treatment was the centre of a violent controversy in the United States a few years ago. A pronounced echo of the storm reached the shores of Great Britain, and medical men and psychists took a lively interest in the treatment and alleged cures. The controversialists eventually divided themselves into three camps, *viz.*: (1) those who were convinced that the Abrams treatment did all that was claimed for it, *in the way that was claimed for it*; (2) those who were convinced that the alleged 'cures', if genuine, were effected by psychic means, or by 'suggestion' on the part of the E.R.A. practitioner; (3) those who were certain that the whole affair was a money-making 'frame-up' on the part of a Yankee medical hustler who ought really to be in the ranks of the conjurers. In 1924 the *Scientific American* published an important *exposé*, and this, of course, strengthened the hands of the orthodox practitioners and the sceptics.

In England the claims of the Abrams apologists created very considerable interest, and Dr. C. B. Heald, the medical adviser to the Department of Civil Aviation, Air Ministry, decided to start an investigation in this country. He selected a number of gentlemen to help him, and formed a committee which included a conjurer. Sir Thomas Horder became chairman, and early in 1925 he communicated to the Royal Society of Medi-

cine the results of their experiments.<sup>1</sup> The committee found that certain substances, such as drugs, sputa, blood, etc., when placed in the apparatus, *did* effect changes in the abdominal wall of the subject who could feel his muscles of that region contract when certain specimens were placed in the proper position in the 'magic box'. The committee found nothing whatsoever that would lead them to think that the so-called 'rays' had any curative effect or that the 'electronic' treatment would be beneficial in the treatment of diseases. *But they found that a real phenomenon occurred.*

I will now relate a curious discovery I made in connection with a powerful wireless set I installed early in 1924. I feel convinced that there is a connection between the results I obtained and the 'reactions' caused by Abrams's 'magic box'. I will give the account of my experiments in considerable detail in case any of my readers wish to repeat the experiments or make others. My research work was the result of an accident, as I have done very little experimental wireless. I will add, however, *en passant*, that I made and used what I believe was the first portable wireless set constructed in Great Britain. This was in April 1899, the stations being the tower of St. Peter's Church, Brockley, and the top of Aske's Hatcham Boys' School. A short account of the experiments appeared in the Press at the time.

My wireless installation, which was home-made, was a five-valve set with approved reaction. It was a very powerful receiving set employing two stages of high frequency amplification, one detector and two stages of low frequency amplification. Tuned anodes were used on both high frequency stages. The set was very sensitive and selective and much more careful adjustment was required than when using a simpler set, such as a one-, two- or three-valve instrument. The tuning of the

<sup>1</sup>See 'The Magic Box. Tests of "Abrams Rays"' in the *Daily Telegraph* for Feb. 24, 1925.

set was extremely critical. Reaction was obtained by the reaction coil reacting on the anode coil. This was an approved method of reaction, and was not likely to cause re-radiation troubles. Of course, the set used plug-in coils. The set was made up according to the circuit illustrated in the booklet published by Brown Bros., Ltd., of Great Eastern Street, London, E.C.2, and gave every satisfaction.

The aerial used was the standard single-wire type, one hundred feet in length. The 'earth' was a good one, consisting of a number of brass rods, buried four feet in the ground, not more than ten feet from the instrument (though, as a matter of fact, the set functioned without an 'earth' at all). Soldered to the brass rods were copper wires converging to a single wire running to the 'earth' terminal of instrument. The coils used in the experiments were a No. 200 Burndept on the aerial; a reaction coil, No. 300 Igranic; and two anode coils, Burndept No. 300. The five valves used were as follows: three Marconi Type R. 5v., Nos. H19562, E20924 and E20933; the amplifying valves being two Marconi, Type L.S.5, Nos. C5462 and C5471. The batteries used were low tension, six-volt Exide accumulators, and high tension 100-volt Hellesen dry battery. The loud-speaker (which was always connected during the period of the experiments) was a pleated vellum (hornless) Lumière model, No. 5288, and was purchased in Paris.

I will now relate how I came to make a curious discovery connected with my instrument. Early in November 1924 I was in Paris, and from the 'Radiola' Company<sup>1</sup> I purchased, for thirty-nine francs, an accessory called a 'filter' (*filtre*), which was intended to be placed in the aerial circuit (between aerial terminal and aerial lead-in) in order to 'filter' the ether waves and purify the incoming signals, producing a much more faithful and sweeter reproduction of both music and speech. This it certainly did. I must add that the 'filter' was really a condenser

<sup>1</sup>Société Française Radio-Électrique, 79 Boulevard Haussmann, Paris.



composed of thin mica plates. When fixing the 'filter' to the aerial terminal of my instrument (during which operation I was receiving signals from 5XX, the Chelmsford high-power station of the British Broadcasting Company, Ltd.), and when I had the end of the aerial in my left hand, I happened to touch the positive terminal of the 'filter' (the negative wire was fixed to the instrument) and to my surprise the etheric waves—although passing through my body—were being converted and were operating the loud-speaker, the music (a band) being heard plainly, but not quite so loud as when the aerial was connected directly to the instrument. In order to get the incoming signals of greater strength, I adjusted the valves, at the same time increasing reaction somewhat. I then felt a slight tingling (reminiscent of 'pins and needles') in my right hand, which was still holding the positive terminal of the 'filter'. I again adjusted the three R. 5v. valves (I found that more current passing through the two amplifying valves made no difference) and at once lost the tingling sensation. It was a long time before I recovered the exact position of the three valves by means of which I received the sensation in my hand. Adjusting the condensers of the instrument merely lessened the strength of the 'tingling'. I then changed hands, holding the aerial wire in my right hand and the 'filter' positive terminal in my left. I still detected the tingling, but in my *left* hand and (though this may have been imagination) the sensation was not quite so marked. I then inserted in the instrument the necessary coils to pick up London and other British stations direct, but I could get nothing whatever. The resistance of my body was much too great to allow of the waves being strong enough to operate the loud-speaker, or even the head-phones, the reason being, of course, that London and other British stations were transmitting on a power of (I think) two and one-half kilowatts, whilst Chelmsford was working on a power of sixteen or eighteen kilowatts. The following Sunday I repeated the experiments and

tried also getting the same results from the Paris 'Radiola' transmission, which was then using a power of about five kilowatts. I could still feel a slight tingling during some of the experiments, but owing to the greater distance, Paris came in comparatively weak. I could get no results when the 'earth' was disconnected.

The first experiments recorded above I thought interesting, but attached no particular importance to them. A week or so later I attended a sitting at the rooms of the British Society for Psychical Research, who were experimenting with the Austrian medium, Willi Schneider, whom I had already investigated at Munich. At this sitting was Mr. W. Whately Smith,<sup>1</sup> who was then a member of Sir Thomas Horder's committee which was working on the Abrams investigation. Mr. Smith mentioned to me casually that during some of their experiments, the subject could feel a sensation in the muscles of the abdominal wall when certain drugs which were placed on the electrodes in the famous box were being used. I at once recalled my experiments with the French 'filter' I had used on the wireless set, and wondered if any connection could be found between the sensations I felt and the Abrams 'reactions'. I decided to try, and at the end of February I spent an entire week-end and several evenings in my home trying out in various ways substances which I had in my private laboratory and dark-room, or in my household. Unfortunately, living in a country village, I could get no suitable assistance and had to work single-handed. If my readers are wondering what the connection is between the Abrams rays and psychical research, I candidly confess that I do not know—but there may be something. In any case, the psychical researchers and the magicians have taken an extraordinary interest in the Abrams controversy and this must be my excuse for incorporating in this volume the results of my experiments.

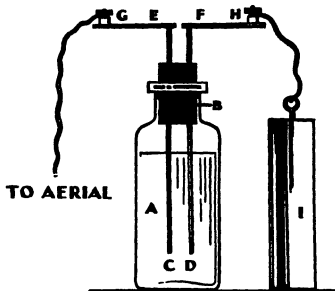
I will now give some data of the conditions, etc., under which I worked. The apparatus, valves, etc., were identical to

<sup>1</sup>Now Mr. W. Whately Carington.

those already described. My general health was good (it is probable that the health of a subject makes a vast difference in the reactions felt), but I was recovering from an influenza cold. The experiments took place in my study, heated by an anthracite stove, night and day, to an average temperature of 65° Fahrenheit. The weather (on the 28th of February and the 1st of March) was sunny, with a somewhat cold wind. The barometer was steadily rising (from 28.9 to 29.6).

Having decided to test a number of substances by interposing them in the aerial circuit of my wireless set, I had to invent or design a suitable container to hold my chemicals, acids, etc. After some few experiments I devised a piece of apparatus illustrated on opposite page.

*A* is a one-ounce bottle of amber or clear glass, with a vulcanite or rubber cork, *B*. In the cork are drilled two  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch holes into which are inserted two thin brass rods (electrodes) *C*, *D*. (For acids, etc., thin carbon rods should be used.) The outer and upper ends of the brass rods have two brass slips (*E*, *F*) soldered to them. In the ends of the slips farthest from the cork are screwed two ordinary brass terminals, *G*, *H*. To the left-hand terminal is connected the aerial wire. To the right-hand terminal is attached a piece of flex connected to a brass cylinder, *I*. This cylinder is held in the left hand of the subject, whose right hand grips a similar cylinder attached by means of a piece of flex to the aerial terminal of the wireless instrument. It will be obvious from the description and illustration of this piece of apparatus—which I have named the Detector—that the incoming etheric waves can pass to the cylinder *I*, the subject, and the wireless instrument, only by means of the medium which is placed in the bottle, *A*; the glass bottle and rubber cork acting as insulators, of course. I had not the slightest idea whether any reaction could be felt by the subject (myself) through using the substances I had at my disposal, though I determined to persevere in order to see if I could get 'sensations' similar to those I



#### THE DETECTOR

A, one-ounce glass bottle; B, vulcanite or rubber cork; C, D, electrodes of brass or carbon; E, F, brass rectangles; G, H, brass terminals; I, brass cylinder connected to H by flex. The substance to be tested is placed in container A, the 'subject' holding in his left hand cylinder I, his right hand holding a similar cylinder attached to the aerial terminal of wireless instrument. The 'etheric reactions' are felt in the right hand.

had experienced through the mica plates of the 'filter', I was very agreeably surprised to find that several substances reacted—some with the familiar tingling sensations of the 'filter', and

others much stronger to the extent of feeling a kind of stiffness or crampedness in the hand holding the cylinder attached to the wireless set. Whether I held this cylinder with my left or right hand made no difference (except that I could not feel it so strongly with my left hand)—it was always the hand holding the cylinder attached to the instrument that experienced the 'reaction'.

I will now give the table of substances used, with their strengths and other particulars. The various chemicals, etc., were taken from my private laboratory and are what I used in photography, microscopy, etc. These substances were placed in the detector (usually in a liquid form), so that whatever the position of the detector, the contents of the container were connecting the two brass electrodes. The instrument was set as already described; Chelmsford (usually) or Paris (Radiola) were always transmitting when the experiments were carried out, and the signals were always audible (except where otherwise mentioned) on the Lumière loud-speaker. The table will be found more or less self-explanatory, but I must say a word about the way I have recorded the *strength* of the reactions felt. If nothing is placed in the column next to the substance being tested, it is understood that no reaction was felt. If a note of interrogation is inserted, the result was doubtful. The most intense reaction is marked 6, the least .5. Variations between these two numbers are marked according to what I estimated to be the strength of the reaction felt. The substances are listed in the order in which I tested them, but it is obvious that eventually a list must be compiled commencing with the subjects giving the greatest reaction. I am not aware if the wave-length makes any difference to the results, but for the sake of completing the data, I must mention that Chelmsford (5XX) transmitted on a wave-length of 1600 metres and Paris (Radiola) on a 1780 wave. Other particulars can be seen from the table (see pages 246 and 247).

An analysis of the Table of Substances will show some very curious results. Out of ninety-two substances tried, only nineteen showed reactions. Out of these nineteen, eight were doubtful, which leaves eleven positive reactions, making just over nine per cent. 'positive' of the substances experimented with. The reader cannot help noticing that the salts of the various metals yielded good reactions. Of the ten positive reactions we find that five of them (potassium ferricyanide, nitrate of silver, chloride of platinum, silver bromide and ferrocium) are metallic salts or a metal. I am under the impression that I could have got a reaction from chloride of gold had I used a stronger solution—but my stock of this salt was limited. The reaction produced through the nitrate of silver caused a sensation in my right hand as if the skin were being drawn up. This is the strongest reaction I felt and was quite unlike the tingling sensation of the reaction caused by the chloride of platinum or the silver bromide. Although I got such good results from the chloride of platinum dissolved in alcohol, I could get no results from the pure platinum wire or from the pure 99·8 alcohol. In the same way, I could get no results from the two-shilling piece I tried, nor from pure ether, although nitrate of silver dissolved in ether gave splendid reactions.

Salt and water in a saturated solution gave marked results, a ten per cent. solution gave weaker results, though quite positive. I could tell instantly when salt and water were in the detector, and I tried the following experiment three times: I made up four ounces of ten per cent. salt solution in distilled water, filtering the solution after the salt had dissolved. I then took four ounces of distilled water and a number of test tubes. In nine test tubes (which were, of course, identical) I poured distilled water, and in three similar test tubes I put the saline water—height of the liquid in each of the twelve tubes being identical. I then put rubber corks in the tubes, placed the tubes in a box with a lid, gently rolled the tubes about in the box, the lid of

TABLE OF SUBSTANCES, WITH ESTIMATED INTENSITY OF REACTION

NAME OF SUBSTANCE	INTENSITY OF REACTION	TRANSMITTING STATION	STRENGTH OF SOLUTION	REMARKS
Water, distilled - -	—	C	—	—
Water, spring - -	—	C	—	—
Water, iron - -	?	C	—	Heavily impregnated.
Water, pond - -	—	C	—	—
Common soda - -	—	C	10%	In distilled water.
Common soda - -	—	C	Sat.	In distilled water.
Common salt - -	1	C	10%	In distilled water.
Common salt - -	2	C	Sat.	Saturated solution in distilled water.
Chlorate of potash - -	—	C	10%	In distilled water.
Quinine sulphate - -	1	C	10%	In acidified water (dist.).
Phenolphthalein - -	—	P	Con.	Concentrated in ether.
Violet copying ink - -	—	P	Con.	As purchased.
Citric acid - -	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Pot. metabisulphite - -	—	C	10%	In distilled water.
Pot. ferricyanide - -	.5	C	10%	In distilled water.
Sod. hyposulphite - -	—	C	20%	In spring water
Ether - -	—	C	Con.	Pure ethyl oxide
Mercury - -	—	C	Con.	—
Peroxide of hydrogen - -	—	C	—	Kingzett's patent
Lump sugar - -	—	C	Sat	In distilled water.
Olive oil - -	—	C	Con.	Pure 'table'.
Paraffin oil - -	?	C	Con.	Commercial lighting
Petrol - -	—	C	Con.	'Shell' No. 1.
Methylated spirit - -	—	P	Con.	Commercial, tinted.
Sod. sulphite - -	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Sod. metabisulphite - -	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Sod. carbonate - -	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Sod. bicarbonate - -	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Nitrate of silver - -	6	C	10%	Dissolved in ether.
Chloride of gold - -	—	C	10%	Dissolved in ether.
Chloride of platinum - -	3	C	10%	Dissolved in alcohol.
Xylol - -	—	C	Con.	(Also known as xylene.)
Benzene - -	—	C	Con.	(Benzol, pure B.P.)
Gum arabic - -	—	C	—	Thick solution in distilled water.
Spirit gum - -	—	C	—	Solution in methylated spirit.
Cedarwood oil - -	?	C	Con.	Thick, as used in microscopv.
Glycerine - -	—	C	Con.	(Glycerol), pure B.P.
Benzine - -	—	C	Con.	(Petroleum ether.)
Absolute alcohol - -	—	C	Con.	99.8 pure.

Oil of cloves	-	-	?	C	Con.	'Technical' quality.
Shellac varnish	-	-	—	C	—	In turpentine.
Chloroform	-	-	—	C	Con.	B.P. grade.
Ammonia .880	-	-	1	C	Con.	Strong.
Ammonia .880	-	-	—	C	10%	In distilled water.
Acetic acid	-	-	—	C	Con.	Glacial B.P.
Acetic acid	-	-	—	C	10%	Glacial, in distilled water.
Sulphuric acid	-	-	—	C	Con.	Pure B.P.
Sulphuric acid	-	-	—	C	10%	In distilled water.
Nitric acid	-	-	—	P	Con.	Pure B.P.
Nitric acid	-	-	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Hydrochloric acid	-	-	—	P	Con.	Pure B.P.
Hydrochloric acid	-	-	—	P	10%	In distilled water.
Vinegar	-	-	—	P	—	Pure malt.
Camphor	-	-	—	C	10%	Japanese, in alcohol.
Urine	-	-	.5	C	—	—
Whisky	-	-	—	C	30 u.p.	Neat, Scotch.
Port wine	-	-	—	C	—	Old.
Ink	-	-	—	C	—	Blue-black, 'Swan'.
Paramodophenol	-	-	?	C	10%	Kahlbaum's pure.
Lime water	-	-	—	C	—	Distilled water.
Gold	-	-	—	C	—	In chain form, 18-carat.
Tin	-	-	—	C	—	Pure, as fuse wire.
Aluminium	-	-	—	C	—	Sheet.
Platinum	-	-	—	C	—	Wire
Silver	-	-	—	C	—	Two-shilling piece.
Copper	-	-	—	P	—	Wire
Potassium	-	-	—	P	—	In lumps, under naphtha.
German silver	-	-	—	P	—	Wire.
Por permanganate	-	-	?	C	10%	In distilled water.
Alum	-	-	—	C	10%	Hot distilled water.
Formalin	-	-	?	C	C 40%	In distilled water.
Red lead	-	-	—	C	—	Powder form.
Lead	-	-	—	C	—	Wire
Hamamelis	-	-	?	C	B.P.	Known as witch hazel.
Oxalic acid	-	-	—	C	10%	B.P.
Turpentine	-	-	—	C	Con.	Refined
Oil of citronella	-	-	.5	C	Con.	Byard's (Australian).
Gaultherid oil	-	-	—	C	Con.	Oil of wintergreen.
Soft iron wire	-	-	—	C	—	—
Silver bromide	-	-	2	C	10%	Dissolved in 10% pot. bromide.
Ferro-cerium	-	-	1	C	—	(Auer metal) stick.
Canada balsam	-	-	—	C	—	Thick, dissolved in xylol.

Abbreviations: C. = Chelmsford Station.  
Con. = Concentrated.

P. = Paris Station.  
B.P. = British Pharmacopoeia.



which was closed, and then removed the tubes. If my life had depended upon pointing out those tubes which contained the saline water, I could not have done so—they appeared identical. I then labelled each tube from one to twelve. I then carefully poured the contents of a tube in the detector, and made a note of the number. This I did with the twelve tubes, carefully rinsing out the detector after each trial. Against the numbers of those bottles the contents of which I thought gave a reaction, I placed the letter R. I then tasted the contents of the tubes, and I found that the saline solutions had reacted every time. I could not very well, with the apparatus at my disposal, repeat this experiment with other substances which showed reactions, because the colour, smell or other characteristics gave me a clue to the contents of the detector. However, I did try it with our drinking water (which contains a lot of free iron) and found that about fifty per cent. of my 'guesses' were correct.

The reaction of the quinine sulphate was most marked. To dissolve the quinine in the distilled water I had to put twenty drops of strong sulphuric acid into the solution. I do not think the acid had anything to do with the reaction experienced, as concentrated or dilute sulphuric gave no reaction at all. Potassium ferricyanide, ten per cent. solution, gave the same intensity of reaction as a thirty per cent. solution, and a mixture (ten per cent. of each) of potassium ferricyanide and hyposulphite of soda in distilled water gave also what I estimated to be .5 of reaction. Strong ammonia .880 gave a marked reaction, but a fifty per cent. solution gave nothing that I could detect. Urine gave a slight reaction. Into two deep amber-coloured bottles respectively I placed some urine and distilled water, and corked them with rubber corks having holes for the electrodes of the detector. I then placed the bottles behind me and mixed them in my hand, after which I could not detect from the appearance of the bottles which contained the water and which the urine. I then connected up in turn each bottle to the detec-

tor, and I could easily distinguish the contents of the bottle containing the urine. I detected the oil of citronella in the same way.

The metals I tried were fastened merely by wires in the aerial circuit, and I am not surprised that no reactions were noticed. But the ferro-cerium is really a mixture of pyrophoric alloys of iron and cerium with other metals of the cerium group. It is also called 'Auer metal', 'misch-metall', etc., and is used in strike-a-lights, cigar lighters, etc. Erto, the Italian medium, discovered the uses of ferro-cerium!<sup>1</sup> Marked reaction was experienced with sticks of ferro-cerium, but which particular constituent is responsible for this is a matter for research. The iron in it probably does not help us, as I can get no reaction with soft iron or steel.

It will be noticed that when I was using the Paris (Radiola) transmission I could get no reactions. Paris is about two hundred miles from my wireless installation, Chelmsford being about seventy-five miles from my home. Though Paris is more than twice as far as Chelmsford, I do not think the weaker waves were altogether responsible for the absence of reactions. Those acids (such as nitric, hydrochloric, etc.) which I tried when Paris was transmitting, I again put in the detector when I was receiving Chelmsford—with the same results. I likewise tried some of the metals again, but I could find no difference whether Paris or Chelmsford was on. But there is one exception I must note: the metal potassium I tried from Paris first and then from Chelmsford. With Paris transmitting I got nothing, but with Chelmsford working I fancied I felt a faint reaction, though this may have been due to the naphtha in which it was immersed, as I previously had experienced a faint reaction when using common paraffin oil. Potassium is very difficult stuff to work with, and although I again tried putting the metal in the circuit without the naphtha (with the same

<sup>1</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, pp. 354-76.

slight reaction), the pieces were still damp with the spirit, which may have accounted for the slight sensation felt; but personally I do not think so. Afterwards I tried using the potassium immersed in ether, but the results were not very successful.

I think it is quite certain that the power of the etheric waves being used makes a vast difference to the strength of the reactions or 'sensations' felt. I could easily reduce the intensity of the reaction by turning down the valves of my instrument, and often I lost the reaction altogether, after which I had *extreme difficulty* in again getting the settings of the valves so that the reactions could be felt. I always worked on the maximum power I could get out of my set. If I had lived near Chelmsford it is probable the reactions would have been much greater. With unlimited power it is reasonable to suppose that very great reaction could be felt by some subjects. Using more 'reaction' on the instrument increased the audible signals on the loud-speaker but did not intensify the reactions (or sensations) felt.

With some of the substances experimented with I used *two* detectors a foot apart. In the case of the salt and water experiments I got identical results, but with a decrease in audibility in the loud-speaker. The signals were weaker because of the extra resistance of the second detector. When using the same amount of fluid in the one detector that I had previously used in the two, no decrease was noticeable—proving that the extra bulk of liquid was not responsible for the decreased signals.

It is certain that instruments will have to be devised to enable us to measure the reactions caused by the substances I have named. I am assuming, of course, that it will be *possible* to register the sensations felt by the human 'instrument'. It may not be possible, but I think that the age, sex, health, etc., of the 'medium' or 'subject' affect greatly the intensity or the number of reactions felt. Whereas I have put 6 against the reaction I felt with an ether solution of nitrate of silver, a healthy young girl

might experience a reaction of .5 only. Whilst I fancied I could detect a faint reaction with witch hazel (*hamamelis*), an aged man, in bad health, might perhaps get a reaction equal to 6. There is a vast amount of research work to be done, and it is to be hoped that instruments will be found sensitive enough to record the 'waves', 'vibrations', or whatever they are that compose the sensations felt through the reactions. I have, of course, tried with galvanometers, voltmeters, ammeters, an electro-scope, etc., but can so far find nothing to register the reactions, which may not be electrical. An Eindhoven galvanometer might be affected.

It is possible that all persons are not suitable subjects with which to experiment. Perhaps we shall find that mediums (in the psychic sense) will prove more sensitive to the 'etheric reactions' (to coin a suitable term for the phenomena) than a person not psychic. This is possible, I think, and will have to form the subject of extensive research. I have not—at this period—the slightest knowledge of the causes in us or in the substances tried that produce the sensations, which are not at all like an electric shock. It is much too early to theorise concerning the nature of these reactions, but as we have seen that some metallic salts have the power of producing these reactions in us, it is possible that the metallic salts in us have some affinity with the metal salt placed in the detector, and that the incoming etheric waves are in some way made to excite those salts, which reveal themselves by the tingling sensation experienced. But all this is the merest speculation. What we really want to know is what change takes place in the substance in the detector when the etheric waves are passed through it. Or does any change take place in the energy (in form of ether waves from oscillations crossing the aerial wire) which passes through the detector, the subject, and eventually into the instrument? Or perhaps the electrons in our body are disturbed, excited, or regrouped by the change (produced in the detector) in the incoming

etheric waves. We seem to have an interesting problem before us.

It has been suggested that the reactions were really faint electrical currents from either the high- or low-tension batteries used in the set. But experiments have proved that no leakage occurs from the batteries; because if there were 'leaks', they could be measured by means of suitable instruments. Also, the stronger reactions are not a bit like electric shocks. And, of course, if the reactions were ordinary electrical currents, the metal tests, such as gold, silver, platinum, etc., would intensify the shocks, owing to their greater conductivity. But all the metals (with the exception of ferro-cerium) inhibited the reactions.

I have already remarked that there is a vast amount of research work to be done in the elucidation of the mystery of these curious 'reactions', and should any of my readers care to experiment, I suggest that they try with different makes of valves, coils, transformers, aeriels, 'earths', etc., as well as with many substances not mentioned in my list. An important part of future research will be the testing of the reactions on persons (especially psychic mediums) of both sexes and all ages—both in good and ill health. The reactions may prove beneficial in healing, or they may have some effect in improving the reception of wireless transmission. I should not be surprised if it is found that the 'waves', 'rays', 'vibrations' or reactions which can be felt are similar to those which Abrams exploited for so many years. The fact that he left two million dollars (which was the subject of a legal fight between his relatives and the Electronic Institute which he founded) at his death<sup>1</sup> proves how successful he was. I do not suggest that there is any money in 'etheric reactions', but it is within the bounds of possibility that they may prove beneficial to health, useful to science, or of service to us in our pursuit of information relating to the laws governing psychic phenomena.

<sup>1</sup>Which occurred early in 1924.

## XV. Stage Telepathy and Vaudeville 'Phenomena'

From the earliest days of what I will call the modern vaudeville act, the stage demonstration of a pretended sixth sense has always appealed to performers and public alike. People enjoy being fooled by some mystery they can neither solve nor comprehend.

The commonest and most ancient form of stage 'mediumship' is that which simulates telepathy or thought-transference, sometimes termed 'mental magic'—though I am afraid there is much more hard work than magic in this class of entertainment. 'Mental' effects can be produced by means of collusion, a concealed telephone, radio, speaking-tube, etc., though in the case of professional 'mind-readers' these methods are now obsolete. We are apt to regard this form of entertainment as quite modern, but it was Giuseppe Pinetti de Wildalle (c. 1750-1800),<sup>1</sup> a clever Italian and the first 'scientific' conjurer who (with his wife) really introduced (in 1783) the stage telepathic act, and the method he employed was in the form of a code, certain words representing certain objects, numbers, colours, shapes, etc. For example, in the sentence, 'What do I hold here?' the word 'hold' might stand for the metal silver and 'here' for watch. If the word 'holding' were substituted for 'hold', the

<sup>1</sup>See: *Amusemens Physiques*, by Giuseppe Pinetti de Wildalle, Paris, 1784 (Eng. trans. *Physical Amusements and Diverting Experiments*, London, 1784). In an article, 'The Evolution of Some Popular Conjuring Tricks,' by Harry Price, published in *The Listener* (Dec. 28, 1932) is reproduced an engraving of Pinetti doing his principal tricks, including the 'telepathic' act. For further information concerning Pinetti and stage telepathy, see 'Illusionismo', an article by Harry Price in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, Vol. 18, pp. 854-60, Rome, 1933.

metal gold might be indicated. He had an automaton figure about eighteen inches in height, named the 'Grand Sultan' or 'Wise Little Turk', which answered questions as to chosen cards, etc., by striking a bell, intelligence being communicated to a confederate by an ingenious arrangement of the words, syllables or vowels in the questions put. Later, in 1785, Pinetti substituted his wife for the automaton. Signora Pinetti, sitting blindfold in a front box of the theatre, replied to questions and displayed her knowledge of articles in the possession of the audience. Fifty years later this was developed with greater elaboration and the system of telegraphing cloaked by inter-mixing signals or other methods of communication, first by Robert-Houdin (1805-1871) in 1846, then by the 'Great Hermann' in 1848, and by John Henry Anderson, the 'Wizard of the North', about the same date. These methods were greatly improved in later years and brought to perfection by Julius Zancig (1857-1929) and his wife.<sup>1</sup>

But the above systems of secretly conveying information to an assistant, clever as they were, have been more or less superseded, the signals being now partly visual (the 'silent' code) instead of aural. By a turn of the head, the movement of an eyelid, the position of a finger, a gesture, slight sounds at varying intervals, or even a pre-arranged method of breathing, the 'agent' (the sender of the idea) in the auditorium is able to convey to the percipient (the receiver, who can often see through or under the bandage covering the eyes) on the stage the name of the object he is holding or concerning which information is required. Some entertainers have their own secret methods. I need hardly add that this work requires on the part of the performers incessant practice, an abnormal memory, and considerable showmanship.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See 'Our Secrets! Greatest Stage-Act Mystery Solved at Last', by Julius Zancig, a series of articles in *Answers* (London), commencing Oct. 4, 1924.

<sup>2</sup>Scores of books written for conjurers contain codes for vaudeville second-sight acts. See the Bibliography in *Revelations of a Spirit Medium*,



Marion 'finding' a pre-selected playing card.

(See page 271)





A variant of the pseudo-telepathic act is that known as 'muscle-reading', the great exponent of which was Stuart Cumberland (*i.e.* Charles Garner).<sup>1</sup> I knew Cumberland well, and he made no secret of how he performed his feats. A member of the audience would hide a small object in the auditorium, its whereabouts being unknown to Cumberland who, upon being called into the theatre, would seize the person's wrist and with a rush almost drag him to the hidden object.

'Muscle-reading' feats are performed by the agent becoming perfectly passive while the performer (the percipient) detects the slightest reaction on the part of the subject when being led *away* from the hidden object. Dr. G. M. Beard of New York wrote an interesting monograph<sup>2</sup> which fully explains how to attain efficiency in this peculiar form of entertainment. Although I have stated that the vaudeville coded telepathic act was developed by Pinetti, he did not originate it. Professor Johann Beckmann, of Göttingen University, in his *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Erfindung* (1780-1805),<sup>3</sup> gives an account of a 'talking' figure, made in 1770, which was operated by a man who was instructed by a confederate *using a secret code and making secret signs*.

Other famous vaudeville 'telepathists' include Robert Heller<sup>4</sup> (*i.e.* William Henry Palmer) and Haidée Heller, American edited by Harry Price and E. J. Dingwall, London, 1922 (2nd edition 1930), and 'Short-Title Catalogue of Works on Psychical Research', etc., by Harry Price, *Proceedings of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research*, Vol. I, Part II, London, 1929.

<sup>1</sup>See *A Thought-Reader's Thoughts*, London, 1888, and *People I Have Read*, London, 1905, both by Stuart Cumberland.

<sup>2</sup>*The Study of Trance, Muscle-Reading and Allied Nervous Phenomena*, by George Miller Beard, New York, 1882. See also 'More Muscle-Reading', by Leroy H. Holbrook, in *Suggestion Magazine*, New York, for Jan. 10, 1905, and *Contact Mind-Reading*, by Daniel Fitzkee, San Francisco, 1935.

<sup>3</sup>Eng. trans. *A History of Inventions and Discoveries*, by Johann Beckmann (4 vols.), 2nd edition, London, 1814.

<sup>4</sup>See *Robert Heller, His Doings*, Glasgow, n.d., and *Hellerism: Second Sight Mystery*, Boston, Mass., 1884.

pseudo-mediums who flourished during the latter part of the nineteenth century; Alfred and Edward Capper<sup>1</sup> (whom I saw many times), who, with their sister (I think her name was Nellie), mystified British audiences with their pseudo-telepathy at about the same time as the Three Svengalis<sup>2</sup> put on a 'mind-reading' act in London; Bénévol,<sup>3</sup> the French conjurer and pseudo-medium who staged 'psychic' entertainments; Ernesto Bellini;<sup>4</sup> and those clever entertainers, the Zomahs<sup>5</sup> (Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Giddings) and the Trees, who happily are still with us.

Are such entertainments legitimate? Undoubtedly, if supernormal faculties are not claimed for the performers. Neither the Zomahs nor Trees pretend that their powers are 'psychic'; they are members of well-known magical associations: need I say more? Some of these entertainers are extraordinarily clever. On March 30, 1932, the Magicians' Club presented me with their gold jewel and arranged at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research a demonstration of vaudeville telepathy and other 'psychic' effects by various performers, and the Zomahs were among them. The library was packed with about seventy persons. Madame Zomah, blindfolded, was at one end of the room and her husband was at the other. A solid wall of people was between them, and there was no platform. Not a word was spoken by Mr. Zomah and yet his wife instantaneously described objects, numbers, colours, etc., as they were handed to her husband. It was a magnificent exhibition of vaudeville tele-

<sup>1</sup>See *A Rambler's Recollections and Reflections*, by Edward Capper, London, 1915.

<sup>2</sup>See 'The Astonishing "Mind-Reading" Feats of the "Three Svengalis"', in *Science Stiftings Annual*, London, 1902-3.

<sup>3</sup>See *Les Trucs du 'Médium' Bénévol*, by André Durville, Paris, 1918. See the same author's *Le Secret de la Cage Spirite* (tricks of the medium Carancu), Paris, 1918.

<sup>4</sup>I possess an interesting portrait medallion issued by this man.

<sup>5</sup>See 'I Know Your Thoughts. Zomahs Demonstrate to the People', article in *The People* newspaper, London, Dec. 21, 1924.

pathy. Many people prefer to accept as abnormal some manifestation which they cannot explain or understand, and the reason for this is that they are entirely ignorant of those methods by means of which psychic phenomena can be simulated<sup>1</sup>—and they do not thank you for trying to explain things to them! It is quite obvious that no genuine psychic could perform three times per day (as many of these stage 'mediums' do) to order, year in and year out. The credulous will freely admit this—especially when explaining the failure of a medium under test to produce phenomena. They will tell you that phenomena cannot be turned on like a tap. And yet, most illogically, these same persons will accept as genuine the manifestations of any stage 'medium' who is under contract to produce 'phenomena' twice nightly!

The Zancigs were hailed as 'genuine psychics' by many people, but their entertainment was poor when compared with the Zomahs or the Trees. I knew the late Julius Zancig well and we had many a good laugh about the way some credulous people accepted their entertainment as supernormal—instead of realising that their 'gift' was the result of constant application to their business, and eight hours' hard labour every day, whether 'working' or not. It is true that in his pamphlet, *Adventures in Many Lands* (London, 1924), Zancig claimed that his powers were of an occult nature, but he was writing with his tongue in his cheek. During the same year he published his code and revealed his 'secrets'<sup>2</sup>—or at least some of them. Mr. J. Malcolm Bird, formerly an associate editor of the *Scientific American*, in-

<sup>1</sup>Mr. David Devant, in the *Windsor Magazine* for December 1935 (pp. 118-9) records in his article 'Illusion and Disillusion' how Sir Oliver Lodge refused to believe that a rather simple, but clever conjuring trick (billet reading) was not done by psychic means: 'After the performance Mr Nevil Maskelyne and I saw Sir Oliver and assured him that the results which seemed so remarkable were obtained by trickery. Imagine our surprise and disappointment when he refused to believe us.' Mr. Devant reveals the secret of the trick.

<sup>2</sup>See page 254, Note 1, *op. cit.*

formed me that in 1923 or 1924 Zancig made a perfectly definite proposal to his journal involving the publication of his methods, under a guarantee that any reader would be able to use them and, subject to mnemonic ability, to obtain results with them fairly comparable to Zancig's own work. In 1924 Zancig revealed to me his method of using the silent code. Zancig died in the Santa Monica (California) hospital on July 27, 1929, aged seventy-two, after a two years' illness.

I reiterate that the performances of those 'telepathists' I have named are legitimate; they are clever and entertaining, and they are artists. But there are shows of another kind where the 'mind-reading' effects are due to crude confederacy and miserable collusion. I was fortunate enough to stumble across one of these entertainments at Innsbruck in June 1925, and I had a most amusing time solving the mystery of the Tyrolese spellbinders. A record of my diverting adventures is printed in the present volume.

I am also inclined to place in the same category a vaudeville hypnotic act which I witnessed at Interlaken in July 1926. This act was being exhibited by a Dr. Gaston Haas of St. Just, Zurich, who toured the country with a girl, a youth and a cinema outfit. Haas was the hypnotist, and the assistants were his subjects, who did the usual ridiculous things at the bidding of their employer—but there was no proof that they were in an abnormal state when they did them. But they made the audience laugh—which is very important from a showman's point of view. A full account of Haas's entertainment appears in these *Confessions*. Before the War there were many hypnotic acts (*e.g.* Kennedy's) on the road, but as a means of entertainment they have gone out of fashion—at least in England. I think the spiritualist mediums who give public clairvoyance have taken their place. It is so *very* easy to simulate, for stage purposes, 'mesmerism', hypnotism, catalepsy and trance. Speaking of trance reminds me that the most amusing 'psychic'

mystery I ever solved was at the Prater, Vienna (I had gone there to witness Willi Schneider 'levitate' himself<sup>1</sup>), where I discovered that a Hindu fakir who had been 'entranced for three years' had mechanical lungs and was wound up with a clock key. Particulars of this clever fraud can be found in my *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book* (London, 1933, pp. 337-8).

So far we have dealt principally with 'telepathists' (usually a pair) who work with codes, visual or aural, and who put up a really good show which appears miraculous—to the uninitiated. But there is another class of stage 'medium' who employ neither codes nor confederates nor partners: they work alone. Among those I can name, offhand, are Erik Jan Hanussen<sup>2</sup> (whom I saw in Berlin; he was afterwards found murdered there on Saturday, April 8, 1933), Maloïtz (*i.e.* Moische Blitz), Miss Gene Dennis, Fred Marion (*i.e.* Josef Kraus), and Dr. A. J. McIvor-Tyndall.

When I saw Hanussen (*i.e.* Hermann Steinschneider) he put up a very interesting and impressive performance, which included some 'experiments' which appeared suspiciously like card tricks. He probably had confederates (these are known as 'horses', 'boosters', or 'floor-workers') in the audience, and many of the effects I witnessed were comparable to those obtained by Marion, who, of course, produces similar results unaided. One cannot, from the audience, test a stage performer, and the 'phenomena' I witnessed could have been produced normally in various ways. I tried to get Hanussen to England some few years ago, and I was still hoping to do so when he met his death.

Maloïtz is a Dutch opera singer turned mind-reader. Trained for the operatic stage, he found that vaudeville telepathy

<sup>1</sup>For an account of these experiments see 'An Account of Some Further Experiments with Willi Schneider', by Harry Price, *Journal of the American S.P.R.* August 1925.

<sup>2</sup>See *Meine Lebenslinie*, by Erik Jan Hanussen, Berlin, 1930.

brought him in more engagements, though he still uses his voice in his act. I believe he is known as the 'singing medium'.

Maloïtz impressed me very much. He came to see me one afternoon and consented to be tested. He went out of my office and I closed the door. On a piece of paper I wrote: 'Remove the long framed poster of the Davenport Brothers from off the wall and take it out of the office.' I put the piece of paper in my pocket. Maloïtz was then admitted to the room. Not a word was said. He seized my wrist and almost dragged me to the wall on which was a collection of framed posters issued by the Davenport Brothers. Still holding my wrist he slowly scrutinised every poster until his eye alighted on one on the extreme right. This was the largest of the collection; it was printed in the Russian and French languages on green paper. With barely a moment's hesitation, he took the poster from off the wall and quickly took it and me out of the room. The experiment was a brilliant success. Of course it was muscle-reading, but exceedingly clever. The fact that the poster was the largest, and the only one on coloured paper, undoubtedly subconsciously influenced my choice. This may have assisted Maloïtz. The next experiment he tried was *without* physical contact, but I was instructed to keep close to him during the attempt to carry out my written and secret instructions. He failed. But a similar experiment with a friend, Mr. A. L. Dribbell, immediately after, succeeded perfectly. A few weeks later Maloïtz kindly demonstrated at a dinner I gave M. René Sudre, and was quite successful. I tried to engage Maloïtz for a series of experiments at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research (of which I was director), but his agent required £20 per *séance*, a sum I was not prepared to pay.

Miss Gene Dennis descended on London during the middle of April 1934. She came from America to fulfil an engagement at the Palladium music hall. On the programme she was billed as 'the psychic marvel of the age', 'human beyond the ordinary,

but not super-human', 'the girl who amazed Einstein' (no evidence was forthcoming to prove this assertion), etc., etc. The Palladium's patrons were warned that 'Miss Dennis does not answer trifling questions, but is here to answer those of a more serious nature. . . . She cannot tell you your name, address, telephone number . . . and you will confer a favour upon her and the management if you will confine your questions to problems which deeply concern and interest you.' The reader will notice that Miss Dennis does not claim to get *definite* information about anything.

Miss Dennis called on me on the Friday before her Palladium engagement and I found her a pleasant, unassuming young woman. She told us she was a farmer's daughter from Kansas, and she certainly looked the part; a typical country girl from the Middle West. She gave us one or two readings which were supposed to describe our characters.

On Thursday, April 26, 1934, I accepted the management's invitation to see Miss Dennis at the Palladium. Her method of answering questions on that afternoon was to have a posse of assistants in various parts of the theatre who relayed the questions to her, one at a time. So she started off with the advantage of answering only those questions which the assistants called out to her. I assumed that undesirable questions were not relayed to her. Standing on the stage, with a small microphone in her hand, she rattled off answers to the questions that were fired at her—*via* the assistants—from different parts of the house. I remember two of them:

Lady in gallery: Will my husband return to me, and should I forgive him?

Miss Dennis: When did your husband leave you?

L. in G.: Thirty-five years ago. [Laughter.]

Miss Dennis: He will not return; do not worry about him, but find someone else.



The next question came from a young fellow, seated a few feet away from me. He said: 'Shall I go to America this August and will the venture be successful?' Miss Dennis replied to the effect that he *would* go to America, but not before the autumn. Also, that the venture *would* be successful. In connection with the trip she said she could 'see a bundle of MSS'. The young man appeared pleased with the prognostication. I chatted with him afterwards and he said he thought of going to the United States in an attempt to get a play produced. He thought Miss Dennis had made a great hit.

But an analysis of Miss Dennis's reply to the young man proves that the same answer would have fitted many other people and situations. The 'bundle of MSS.' could apply to any author, actor, stockbroker, printer, professional man (such as doctor, lawyer, etc.), teacher, lecturer, politician, engineer, inventor, etc. In fact, to almost any business man whose affairs took him to America. Even a bundle of letters could be called 'a bundle of MSS.' and Miss Dennis knew the young man was going on business of some sort, because his question revealed that fact. And no business man goes to America in August if he can help it: it would be more natural to go in the autumn.

Miss Dennis kindly visited the National Laboratory on Tuesday, May 1, 1934, and demonstrated to a group of members and others who had assembled to meet her. Her 'readings' and descriptions of people were interesting and she made several good hits. But there was no evidence that there was anything psychic about it. Professor Dr. Cyril Burt and Mr. S. G. Soal were among the audience and, correctly, she described them as being of the academic type. But they *look* academic, and in Miss Dennis's presence Professor Burt was referred to once as 'doctor'. Mr. Soal was stated to be 'a teacher' (which, of course, he is) who had 'nothing to do with mathematics'. This was a bad shot, as Mr. Soal's subject happens to be mathematics. But we spent an interesting afternoon, and I was sorry I could



Marion psychometrizing a letter.

(See page 2-5)



not arrange a series of test experiments. Miss Dennis's work is entertaining, but from a spectacular point of view is not, in my opinion, comparable with the *séances* of Marion or Maloitz.

What is the secret of these vaudeville 'psychic' entertainers? How is it done? These questions can be answered in several ways. Without any suggestion of common trickery, collusion, etc., these people possess a number of faculties which are very highly developed—just as a virtuoso has certain faculties which, when highly developed, enable him to play, say, the violin better than most people. Stuart Cumberland possessed the highly-developed faculty of instantly detecting the reflex action of the muscles when the 'agent' he was leading (actually, the agent was leading him) was not heading for the hidden object.

One faculty possessed by most stage 'mind-readers' or clairvoyants is the ability to 'read', not a *mund*, but a person, or a person's character, more quickly or more accurately than the layman. The clever telepathist will—perhaps unconsciously—absorb and analyse *indicia* from a person's clothes, speech, appearance, manner of walking, etc. He will see things and form deductions (through long training and practice) from discriminating marks which would not be visible to one person in a thousand.

Another faculty possessed by some 'mind-readers' is a hyperæsthetic one. In certain respects they are abnormally sensitive. This exaggerated sensibility may be of one or more than one sense. One performer may possess hyperæsthesia of all the five special senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. Others may be supersensitive to only one sense, *e.g.* touch. I have seen a man stroke the back of a playing-card drawn from a new pack and pick the same card out again, in the dark, after it had been shuffled into the pack. In a recent law case Captain Gerald Lowry, the blind osteopath, was handed an ordinary pack of cards and, by feeling them, he was able to tell what each one was. This was an exhibition of hyperæsthesia of the sense of

touch, which had been rendered more acute since he was blinded. In the same way, I have seen a person distinguish the back of a new playing-card (after having seen it once only) after it had been shuffled into the pack. He recognised minute variations in the printing which were not visible to me. This was an example of hyperæsthesia of the sense of sight. The success of the 'telepathic' experiments of Professor Gilbert Murray<sup>1</sup> was due, I think, to hyperæsthesia of the sense of hearing which he probably possessed without knowing it. I am convinced that both Marion and Maloïtz are hyperæsthetes, though perhaps unaware of the fact. Though Cumberland was a 'muscle-reader', it is probable that he was hyperæsthetic as regards sight and hearing, which would enable him to translate the *indicia* exhibited by his audience (who, of course, were in the secret) into informing him whether he was 'hot' or 'cold' in his quest for the hidden object—thus extra help in addition to that given by the passive 'agent' who was unconsciously leading him to the hiding-place.

In addition to the above extra-normal faculties possessed by vaudeville mind-readers, a good deal of information is extracted from the audience themselves by the questions they ask (or the way they ask them) or the answers they give. I am not now referring to the 'pumping' or 'fishing' process indulged in by certain spiritualist *clairvoyantes* or trance mediums. Many of the questions asked at public demonstrations contain their own answers. There was only one answer that Miss Dennis could have given to the young fellow at the Palladium. The way he asked his question implied that he thought he was going to America, and as to the 'venture', of course we *all* hoped it would be a success! We should have been astounded if Miss Dennis had answered something like this: 'You will *not* go to America either this August or next August, or any August. I see bundles of handcuffs. . . . Your venture will *not* be a success,

<sup>1</sup>See *Proceedings*, London S.P.R., Vol. XXIX, 1918, Part 72

because you will be hanged before you have a chance to try it out.' That sort of thing would never do: even professional *clairvoyantes* have to be pleasant! To sum up, then, those vaudeville 'mediums' who work to contract, at a set time and place, two or three times daily, in good or ill-health, depend upon: a quick wit; keen observational powers; a perfect knowledge of human nature; the power to read and translate minute *indicia* missed by the ordinary person; the ability to judge character; an aptitude for extracting questions which contain their own answers, and for giving answers which will bring forth further information; lucky shots and generalities ('I get the name Tim, Tom, Jim, John . . . middle height . . . brown hair, dark coat, black hat . . . fairly young . . . asks for mother . . . speaks of Annie, Jane, Mary . . . something about a pet dog . . . is worried about a paper . . . says he is very happy . . . sends love to children . . . does anyone recognise this spirit?' and so on, *ad nauseam*) which are applicable to fifty per cent. of the audience; the knack of dodging awkward or leading questions, at the same time handing out equivoques which you can take how you like! Such is the *modus operandi* of the typical stage *clairvoyante*, and some are very skilful at presenting a show which impresses the uncritical and the uninitiated. Of course, those whose entertainments consist of effects produced by muscle-reading, hyperæsthesia of the senses, and similar natural faculties, are in a different category and are delightful entertainers, though they cannot claim to be psychic. But however these pseudo-psychic effects are produced, two essentials are necessary—good showmanship and considerable effrontery. I have seen performances by platform *clairvoyantes* who depended solely on an unblushing impudence to pull them through. Quite recently I heard a trance medium reel off *eighteen common Christian names* (Tom, Dick, Harry, Bert, Maud, etc.) before the person addressed recognised the name of any relative who had 'passed over'.

Though probably unaware of the fact, Miss Gene Dennis made psychic history when she broadcast in the 'In Town To-night' series from London on Saturday, April 21, 1934, just before her appearance at the Palladium. The announcer told us that three (more or less distinguished) persons were in the studio and that Miss Dennis had never previously met them, and was unaware of their identity. The medium then proceeded to tell them something about their past, present and future. The persons (all were connected with the entertaining profession, and, therefore, likely to be sympathetic to a sister artiste) admitted that what Miss Dennis had said was correct, or likely to prove correct.

Why I have mentioned the B.B.C. *séance* is because it was the first time that a professional 'medium' had broadcast in this country; it was the first time a '*séance*' had been put on the ether in this country; it was the first time that phenomena—real or alleged—had been put on the air by the B.B.C. Since Miss Dennis's visit two astrologers (including a lady from Hollywood<sup>1</sup>) have broadcast.

I have omitted to mention those vaudeville mediums who 'perform' various actions while in an alleged hypnotic state. They usually specialise in some form of musical act for the simple reason that they *must entertain* their audiences at all costs. The Three Svengalis put on a faked hypnotic musical act and their methods have been published.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of this particular type of entertainment, an alleged 'musical medium' was exposed some years ago, and the fraud was so clever that I make no apologies for giving the *modus operandi*.

As usual there were two of them, a man and a girl. The girl was the 'medium' and her companion went among the audi-

<sup>1</sup>Miss Nella Webb, the 'astrologer to Hollywood', broadcast on May 11, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>See page 256, Note 2. See also *Secrets of Stage Hypnotism: Stage Electricity, and Bloodless Surgery*, by 'Karlyn' (i.e. J. F. Burrows), London, 1912.



'Sentry box' apparatus, with panels 1 and 3 removed, constructed to test the theory that Marion finds hidden objects by acquiring *indicia* from the experimenters.

(See page 275)





ence, asking various people to write down on slips of paper the titles of well-known operas, melodies, etc. I should add that while this was being done a committee on the stage was carefully blindfolding the medium. It is probable that the medium could *not* see, as her eyes were plugged with cotton wool, which was secured by adhesive tape: a black bandage covered all. Her ears were also plugged and taped.

When the titles had been written down, a member of the audience collected the papers (not a word being spoken) and put them in his pocket. The 'hypnotist' then mounted the stage. This mediumship was alleged to be a dual one: the woman was the positive element, the man was the negative.

When the young woman had been seated at the piano, the man proceeded to 'hypnotise' her by making several passes across her head and back. Not a word was spoken. Everything was then ready.

Standing beside the seated girl at the piano, and facing the audience, the man lightly placed his hand on the top of her head 'to make contact'. After an impressive interval, the girl suddenly commenced to play the various airs, rattling them off one after another in fine style. Those members of the audience who had chosen pieces admitted that their selections had been played, and the slips of paper were available to prove it.

How was it done? That is the question I always ask myself, and in the case I have cited the answer revealed a particularly ingenious swindle. The man had a good memory and memorised the title of each air as it was written down. With his right hand on the girl's head, with his little finger he softly tapped out the titles in Morse code on her forehead! Like most pseudo-mediumistic acts, it was very simple: so simple, in fact, that perhaps some of my readers might like to try the experiment as a parlour game.

One of the greatest of all vaudeville 'musical mediums' was Magdeleine G. This lady was born at Tiflis of a Russian mother

and a Swiss father, both of whom were professional dancers. Magdeleine was also trained as a dancer, singer and pianist. Eventually it was alleged that under hypnosis her interpretation of music and the opera was little short of miraculous. In the—alleged—trance state, and stimulated by the music, a transfiguration would take place and she would dance, sing and impersonate the character in the comedy or tragedy in a way which was stated to be 'transcendental'. The emotions were portrayed 'with a vividness which spellbound all beholders': terror, joy, envy, hate, desire, avarice, pain, etc., transfigured her countenance in a way which, it was stated, was not possible in the un hypnotised state.

I saw Magdeleine at the Garrick Theatre, London, in June 1904. She was then about twenty-six years old. Although I was very young at the time, the performance impressed me as a brilliant musical and dramatic entertainment. The hypnotic part of the performance was quite secondary. She was introduced by her manager, Émile Magnin, a Swiss hypnotist, who 'discovered' her. (He afterwards wrote a comprehensive history<sup>1</sup> of his *protégée*.) After M. Magnin had hypnotised her she became listless and rigid, but at the first chord struck by the orchestra her face underwent an extraordinary transformation: it was as if she had had an electric shock. She jumped up from the couch upon which she had been reclining and began wildly dancing round the stage, her expression changing with the different harmonies of the piece being played: the whole gamut of the emotions was portrayed. Then a number of songs were sung ('The Lost Chord', etc.) followed by violin, piano, and organ solos, to all of which she rendered a mimetic commentary. She had a very sympathetic 'Press'<sup>2</sup> and created quite a sensation. An extraordinary feature of her renderings was that, when the music ceased, she held the pose suggested by the

<sup>1</sup>*L'Art et Hypnose*, by Émile Magnin, Geneva, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>See *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily News*, *Daily Express*, etc., for May 4, 1904.

last chord played, just as if she had been petrified. This *may* have been showmanship. Applause was supposed to cause her 'considerable pain' (more showmanship?). She 'never rehearsed; did not know what music was going to be played to her and, when she awoke from the hypnotic sleep, was quite unaware of what had happened'.

Madame Magdeleine was tested by a number of well-known investigators of the period: Professor Charles Richet, Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, F. W. H. Myers, Carl du Prel, Colonel de Rochas and others. Although Schrenck (who saw her many times at Munich) wrote a book<sup>1</sup> concerning her, he was sceptical about parts of her performance.<sup>2</sup> It is impossible at this distance of time to say how much—if any—of Magdeleine's power of expressing emotions was due to hypnosis, and how much to her training in the histrionic art. The outstanding fact is that she was 'boosted' by her manager all over Europe as a vaudeville turn which, as I can vouch for, was particularly entertaining. Colonel de Rochas<sup>3</sup> also experimented with a musical medium named Lina; and I believe a Spanish dancer, Carmencita, did a similar musical act under hypnosis. Jesse B. H. Shephard was also doing something of the sort in London in 1872.<sup>4</sup>

I cannot conclude this chapter without mentioning the class of 'mediums' known as 'magnetic ladies', 'strength resisters', 'electric girls', *et hoc genus omne*. Lulu Hurst<sup>5</sup> (Mrs. Paul Atkin-

<sup>1</sup>*Die Traumtänzerin Magdeleine G.*, by A. von Schrenck-Notzing, Stuttgart, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>For a brief account, in English, of her London performances, see 'The Musical Medium', by Sidney Dark, in the *Royal Magazine*, London, for Sept. 1904.

<sup>3</sup>See *Les États Profonds de l'Hypnose*, by E. A. Albert de Rochas d'Anglun, Paris, 1892.

<sup>4</sup>See *Unorthodox London*, by Rev. C. M. Davies, London, 1874 (3rd edition), p. 305 ff.

<sup>5</sup>See *Lulu Hurst (The Georgia Wonder) Writes Her Autobiography*, Rome, Georgia, 1897.

son), known as the 'Georgia Wonder' or 'Georgia Magnet', was a famous exponent of this particular form of trickery. Because it is trickery from start to finish. To the uninitiated, it seems little short of miraculous that a slender young woman, holding a billiard cue, can resist the united strength of half a dozen strong men. This is not the place to describe how these tricks (or rather knacks) can be acquired, but I can refer the reader to the literature<sup>1</sup> of the subject where this particular form of 'psychic' imposture is completely 'debunked'—if the reader will pardon my using this most appropriate term.

I need waste little space on such vaudeville 'mediums' as the Davenport Brothers, William M. Fay, Annie Eva Fay, Washington Irving Bishop,<sup>2</sup> J. F. Day, etc. These people were conjurers masquerading as psychics, and no one would walk across the road to-day to see a similar entertainment. But they had a large following of uncritical, credulous and ignorant devotees, and modern spiritualism owes much to these 'mediumistic' spellbinders of the vaudeville stage. I have a large collection of showbills issued by the Davenports in various countries and languages and if doubt still remains as to whether their entertainment was anything but undiluted trickery, a glance at these posters will dispel it: they would do credit to a circus proprie-

<sup>1</sup>See: *The Magnetic Lady, or a Human Magnet De-Magnetised*, by L. A. Weatherly and J. N. Maskelyne, Bristol, 1892; 'How to Pose as a Strong Man', by E. Barton-Wright, an article in *Pearson's Magazine* for Jan. 1899 (a complete, illustrated explanation of strength-resisting tricks); 'An Exposé of the Electric Girl', by Nelson W. Perry, an article in a periodical published in London; 'The Electric Girl', by Walter B. Gibson, an article in the Sunday Magazine Section of the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* for March 18, 1923, St. Louis, U.S.A.; 'The Georgia Magnet', by Walter B. Gibson, an article in the Sunday Magazine Section of the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* for Nov. 26, 1922, St. Louis, U.S.A.; 'The Strong Man', by Walter B. Gibson, an article in the Sunday Magazine Section of the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* for Feb. 25, 1923, St. Louis, U.S.A.; 'Monarchs and Muscle', by Phyllis Bentley, an article in the *Strand Magazine*, Vol. 6, London, 1893.

<sup>2</sup>For an account of Bishop's performance, see 'Thought-Reading as a Case of Mutual Influence', by J. S. S.-G., an article in the *Leisure Hour*, Vol. 31, 1882.

tor. When W. H. H. Davenport (1841-1877) died, his brother Ira (1839-1911) carried on the business with J. F. Day. William M. Fay, the Davenports' manager, joined forces with 'Dr. Silvester' (the 'Fakir of Oolu'), an illusionist, and toured Europe with him. The Davenports' sister, Mrs. Lizzie Blandy, saw money in the medium game and she, too, took to the road under the name of Mrs. Lizzie Davenport Blandy. I have one of her posters dated June 7, 1869, and it was issued to advertise her public *séances* at Boston, Mass. And yet there are people who still assert that the Davenports 'might have had some genuine psychic power'! What the Davenports *did* possess was a brazen effrontery, magnificent showmanship, and an aptitude for commanding publicity that amounted almost to a science. Actually, their tricks were very poor.<sup>1</sup> This remark applies also to the youth Alexis (Alexis Didier), a young French *somnambule* who gave public and private demonstrations of alleged clairvoyance and lucidity in London in 1844, when hypnotised by his manager, M. Marcillet. John Forbes, M.D., F.R.S., investigated the claims of this medium and published a scathing report<sup>2</sup> on the boy's 'phenomena'.

I could continue this chapter indefinitely with accounts of men with 'multiple minds',<sup>3</sup> 'calculating boys',<sup>4</sup> healers, 'talking' animals, and similar—very interesting—turns which have

<sup>1</sup>For a large number of works, etc., dealing with the Davenport Brothers, see the 'Short-Title Catalogue' of the National Laboratory of Psychological Research (*Proceedings*, Vol. 1, Part 2).

<sup>2</sup>See *Mesmerism True—Mesmerism False: a Critical Examination of the Facts, Claims, and Pretensions of Animal Magnetism. . . . With an Appendix, Containing a Report of Two Exhibitions by Alexis*, edited by John Forbes, M.D., F.R.S., F.G.S. London, 1845. (Reprinted from *The Lancet* for Aug. 3, 1844.)

<sup>3</sup>See 'The Man With the Multiple Mind', by Fenn Sherie, an article in the *Strand Magazine* (describing the act of Harry Kahne), London, for Oct. 1925.

<sup>4</sup>See the articles: 'Calculating Boys', in the *Strand Magazine* for Sept. 1895; 'The Cleverest Child in the World', by Professor H. Olerich, in the *Strand Magazine* for 1900; 'Calculating Boys', by Dr. A. S. Russell, in *The Listener* for July 11, 1934, and Nov. 27, 1935.

appeared in vaudeville, but I will resist the temptation, and refer the reader to the library<sup>1</sup> of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation, where works on these subjects can be found.

I have said very little about Marion in this chapter because a full report of our experiments, by Mr. S. G. Soal (whom I asked to take charge of the inquiry), is being published as one of the *Bulletins*<sup>2</sup> of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation. But a *résumé* of our tests will not be out of place in this volume.

Both Maloïtz and Marion called upon me within a few weeks of each other and I was fortunate in being able to fix up a contract with the latter for a series of scientific experiments. These lasted for many months. The first experiments we tried with Marion were on the lines of the Stuart Cumberland tests, except that there was no physical contact with the 'agent'. A little nervous at first, he soon got used to us, and gave us some brilliant examples of his skill. In Marion's absence, small articles were hidden in various parts of our large *séance*-room and were found by him within a minute or so. For example, on January 25, 1934, a special test was held and among those present were: Mr. R. S. Lambert and Mrs. Lambert, Professor Dr. Millau Culpin, Dr. Frederick Ridley, Dr. J. Edgley Curnock, Dr. Eva Morton, etc. At 8.13 (I am quoting from the verbatim report) Mr. Lambert gave his fountain pen to Marion who, having lightly stroked it ('sensed' it), left the room. Mr. Lambert then hid the pen in his wife's handbag. Marion was called in, and in

<sup>1</sup>See *Proceedings of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research*, Vol. 1, Part 2, for illustrated 'Short-Title Catalogue' of the library, now housed by the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation. Also *Bulletin I* of the University of London Council, for *Supplement* (books acquired since 1929), London, 1935. This library of 12,500 books was formed by Mr. Harry Price.

<sup>2</sup>'Preliminary Studies of a Vaudeville Telepathist', by S. G. Soal, *Bulletin III* of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation, London, 1936.



Marion making a 'trial' of a tin box as to whether it contains a hidden object.

(See page 279)





one and a quarter minutes had found the pen. Later, a ring was hidden in one of six identical rectangular tin boxes. The boxes were then placed in various parts of the room. Marion returned and, with many apparently nervous, quivering movements of the arm, as of one with the palsy, passed his hand over each box in turn. (Not a word was spoken, and of course Marion did *not* touch the boxes in any way.) Within two minutes, and at the first attempt, he had found the box containing the ring.

The six tin boxes mentioned above played a major part in the Marion experiments. For at least once a week, for several months, these boxes were used in our tests. A handkerchief would be 'sensed' by Marion, who then left the room. A die would then be thrown and, according to what number came uppermost, the handkerchief (in a box) would be placed in a certain location indicated by the number. For example, 3 would mean on the floor, and 2 on the table. It will be seen that it was left entirely to chance as to what position in the room the box (containing handkerchief) was placed. After each attempt, boxes and lids were mixed, and every box changed to another location. Out of hundreds of attempts, Marion had many more correct 'guesses' than could be accounted for by chance. We later discovered that Marion's skill in finding objects is due to the fact that he gathers *indicia* from the audience as to where the handkerchief or other object is hidden. It is difficult to say exactly how he does this—probably he does not know himself. But, as in the case of Mr. Lambert's fountain pen, the *audience knew* in which box the handkerchief, etc., was hidden; consequently, when he was *near* that box, we did something that told Marion that he was getting 'hot'. Whether it was unconscious muscular movements of the body or limbs, some change in the breathing rate, or a different facial expression, it is certain that the experimenters unconsciously informed Marion when he was near the hidden object. Later, we constructed special apparatus which proved that our theory was correct. In his

advertisements Marion claims to be 'clairvoyant', but we received no proof of this.

Playing- and other cards entered largely into our tests. Quoting from the protocol of the same *séance* (January 25, 1934), I find that at 8.43 the five of diamonds was chosen from a new pack of playing-cards and given to Marion, who 'sensed' it. He then went out of the room. The chosen card and five others were shuffled, *in the dark*, and then placed *face downwards* on the table. The lights were switched on, Marion was called in, and, within four minutes and at first trial, had found the correct card. At 9.24 the four of hearts was chosen, mixed with others in the same way, and was found by Marion in one and a half minutes, at the first attempt. On January 31, 1934, further card tests were arranged and he made some brilliant 'guesses'. At 3.30 a new pack of cards was opened and the three of hearts was given to Marion, who 'sensed' it, and went out of the room. Six black cards and the red one were shuffled under the table and laid face downwards on the table. No one in the room knew which card was the three of hearts. Marion came in, commenced sliding each card towards him and, at the fourth, turned it up as the correct card—which it was. This took twenty-eight seconds only.

Marion's ability to find these hidden cards is due to (a) hyperæsthesia of the sense of sight, or (b) hyperæsthesia of the sense of touch. If Marion *feels* a card once (back or front), he can often find it again (in the dark) from amongst many others; if he *sees* the back of a card once, he can often recognise it amongst many others by—according to the theory we have formed—the minute differences that exist on the backs (supposed to be identical) of a pack of playing-cards.

At 4.33 (January 31) Marion was called into our *séance*-room, which was in Stygian darkness, and was asked to 'sense' (or feel) a red card: he then withdrew. The lights were then switched on, and five black cards were taken from the pack

and, with the red card, shuffled under the table. They were then placed on the table, backs upwards. No one in the room knew which of the six was the red card. Marion was called in and, in forty-three seconds, found the correct card by stroking the backs. We, who knew what the card was, could not find it; Marion, who had never seen the card, found it easily. This was a good demonstration of hyperaesthesia of the sense of touch. We did many scores of card tests in various ways with different sorts of cards (some bearing geometrical figures, pictures of animals, colours, numbers, etc.) and we found that where Marion could see or touch a card, he usually scored more successful guesses than chance would account for. When Marion could not touch or see a card (*e.g.* when all were in sealed, opaque envelopes), the successful 'hits' did not indicate any special powers on his part. Certainly, they did not indicate any faculty resembling clairvoyance. As an instance of this, at 4.23 on March 2, 1934, Mr. Soal handed a bundle of thirty-five envelopes to Marion. Each envelope contained either a piece of red paper or a piece of black paper. The envelopes were mixed and Marion was invited to tell us, clairvoyantly, what colour each envelope contained. Out of thirty-five attempts, Marion was right sixteen times and wrong nineteen times. He might have done much better by simple guessing.

I have said that we constructed special apparatus in order to test our theory that Marion 'reads' his audience as to whether he is getting 'hot' or 'cold' when seeking an object. The apparatus consists of a platform on which is erected a sort of sentry-box on four rubber-tired pentagraph wheels. By means of two handles the box can be easily pushed about the room. In front of the box can be hung five panels, each panel, when in position, obscuring a fifth part of the body of any person in the box. If all the panels are in position, then the person is wholly obscured.

To test our theory it was arranged that, though every person

in the room knew where the hidden object was, Marion was permitted to see *only one* of these persons. This person, or 'agent', was placed in the 'sentry-box' and wheeled (by someone who did *not* know where the object was) about the room, behind Marion in his attempts to find the hidden object. (He says that he can do better if the 'agent' keeps close to him.) The remaining members of the audience, who knew where the object was hidden, were screened from Marion's view by means of curtains hung across the room. They were told to 'will' Marion to find the object.

As our tests progressed, we screened various portions of the 'agent's' body and found, generally speaking, that the more he was obscured, the fewer the successes scored by Marion. But the latter was able to acquire helpful *indicia* from even a fifth part of a person's body. But when the 'agent's' body was completely hidden from Marion, the latter scored no more successes than chance would account for. The audience on the other side of the curtains, who were 'willing' Marion to seek in the right direction, did not, apparently, help him a bit.

We also tried another piece of apparatus, a light wooden 'shroud' which covered the whole of the 'agent's' body, except his feet. He was able to walk about the room in this 'shroud', and could see Marion through a thick gauze net in the head-piece. We found that the mere fact of the 'agent's' walking gave Marion clues as to the whereabouts of a hidden object.

These tests convinced us that Marion's 'telepathic' faculty is really hyperæsthesia of some of the senses, plus the ability to read and analyse *indicia* unconsciously provided by his audience. Marion can find an object when he can see the person who has hidden it, and if that person can see him, or hear where he is; when that person is not present, or is invisible, he usually fails.

Marion (a Czechoslovak) regularly tours Europe, and it is probable that he will be in London again at some future date.



wood 'shroud' and visor, screening every part of the 'agent's' body, except his feet. Constructed for tests with Marion.



His public performances are well worth seeing. He has almost uncanny powers of finding hidden objects; but those powers, brilliant as they are, are *not*—so far as we have discovered—of a psychic nature. Marion has a charming personality; he assisted the experimenters in every way, and I was sorry when the tests were over.



## XVI. *A Clever American Hyperæsthete*

In the last chapter I mentioned the name of Dr. A. J. McIvor-Tyndall as being that of a platform 'telepathist' or mind-reader. He is so good that no apology is needed for including an account of his work in these *Confessions*. I have called him an 'American hyperæsthete' because he has lived in the United States for so many years and his home is there; actually, he is an Englishman. White-haired, tall and dignified, one might easily mistake him for an American pastor or colonial bishop: he is not a bit like the popular conception of a medium. He is well-known in the U.S.A. as a medium and lecturer on spiritualist platforms.

Through the kindness of Dr. E. J. Dingwall and the medium's friend, Mr. H. W. Symington, Dr. McIvor-Tyndall gave us a demonstration of his faculties in my laboratory on the evening of May 20, 1935. As he never exhibits his powers unless blindfolded, I prepared a special bandage or mask for use in the experiments. This was composed of two thicknesses of stout black fabric, between which was sandwiched a layer of cotton wool. Four tapes completed the mask. As I point out in the chapter on Kuda Bux, it is extremely difficult to blindfold a person with any degree of satisfaction. But I will admit that we thought it improbable that the medium could use his normal vision during, at least, some of our experiments.

The group invited to meet Dr. McIvor-Tyndall included Mrs. Henry Richards, Dr. E. J. Dingwall, Dr. Guy B. Brown, Mr. H. W. Symington and his two sons, Mr. S. G. Soal, Mr. J. Fry, Mr. Ellic Howe, Mr. Peel Fletcher, Mr. Jackson, and the present writer. Three of the group (Dr. Brown, Mr. Soal and

myself) were members of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation. Miss Ethel Beenham, Secretary to the Council, made the verbatim notes from which this report has been prepared.

In a little speech to the experimenters Dr. McIvor-Tyndall emphasised that all he claimed to do was to 'read concentrated thought'. He said: 'I try to entertain people. In each demonstration I give, I like people to concentrate; everybody *must* concentrate. I want to give a programme in which I can succeed, and you must help me. For the first demonstration, I suggest that those present should concentrate upon one of their number. It is better to form a committee of six persons: when I am out of the room, these should choose someone upon whom to concentrate. I will return blindfolded, and describe the person whom everyone is thinking about.'

Dr. Dingwall and I then took the medium out of the *séance*-room. We plugged his eye-sockets with cotton wool which was kept in place with strips of adhesive surgical tape placed criss-cross from the superciliary arch to the cheekbone. Over all we tied our special mask or bandage. We thought it improbable that he could see.

During our absence from the room, Mr. Soal, Dr. Brown, Mr. Howe, Mr. Fletcher, Mrs. Richards and Mr. K. Symington formed themselves into a committee seated in a semi-circle. Those not on the committee were indicated by numbers. Mr. Soal then threw a die and No. 1 came uppermost. As Mr. Fry was No. 1, the committee agreed to think of him intently.

When we received the signal, Dingwall and I led in the medium, who groped his way to the semi-circle and seized the hands of those at the two extremities. The other members of the committee were told to form a chain by linking hands. Mr. Soal was at one end of the semi-circle and the medium appeared to concentrate on him. He dropped Soal's hand, groped his way round the circle, again seized Soal's hand, but finally re-

marked that there was something the matter as 'I cannot get a picture'.

At this moment I lit a cigar with a lighter which is almost silent. But the medium heard me and said: 'I get the impression of someone lighting a cigarette.' Then he said he could get no impression with Mr. Soal, and seized Dr. Brown's hand. But he again failed and finally abandoned the test, saying that the blindfold was new to him and was causing a sort of psychological inhibition. I then removed the bandage.

For the next test, Dr. McIvor-Tyndall suggested using his own blindfold, which was a handkerchief made of fairly thick black silk. I took the medium out of the room and, in my office, tied the handkerchief tightly round his eyes. We returned to the *séance*-room. The medium groped his way to the committee, took Mr. Fletcher's right hand, then darted towards Mr. K. Symington and at once stated that he was the person upon whom the experimenters were concentrating. This was quite correct. During our absence, Mr. Soal had again thrown the die and No. 3 was indicated. Mr. Symington was the third on the committee. Not a word was spoken during this test, which was as clever as it was successful.

The medium was now getting warmed up to his work. I took him out of the room again and bandaged him with his own silk handkerchief. For this new test, he was asked to find the chosen person *without* previously touching any of the audience. Immediately I led him into the room, he groped his way to the circle and touched Dr. Brown on the head. He then walked slowly round the circle, and passed his hands in front of two or three persons. He returned to Dr. Brown and said: "This is the person!" That was correct—and very clever.

The next test was also partly successful. The medium said that he received 'a picture of a person in a striped suit and striped tie', and indicated Dr. Dingwall. This was not correct, as Mr. Howe had been chosen. But both Dingwall and

Howe wore striped suits and striped ties—hence the not unnatural confusion.

For the next experiment we tried one of the tests we had devised for Marion. Five identical tin boxes were placed in various parts of the room, each location being numbered one to five. It was arranged that a handkerchief should be hidden in one of the boxes. I then took Dr. Tyndall out of the room and blindfolded him with his silk handkerchief. When signalled to do so, we re-entered the *séance*-room and the medium walked slowly round the apartment. Coming to a small table, he picked up the tin box which was lying upon it and said: 'The handkerchief is in here!' This was correct. During our absence, Mr. Soal had determined the hiding-place of the handkerchief by means of the die. No. 5 location was on the small table. Not a word was spoken during this test, which was reminiscent of some of Marion's successes, except that the Czechoslovak hyperæsthetic was never blindfolded during our tests.

The next experiment was suggested by Dr. Tyndall and was quite new to me. He stated that if, during his absence, someone would place a cigar in a person's mouth for a moment or two, and then hide it in one of our five tin boxes, he would, upon returning to the room, discover (a) the whereabouts of the cigar; (b) the person into whose mouth the cigar had been placed.

Dr. Tyndall was taken out of the room by Mr. H. W. Symington, who blindfolded him with the silk handkerchief. During the bandaging, Mr. Soal threw the die and number six came up. Counting from left to right, the sixth person in the room was Mr. Fry, so I placed one of my cigars to his lips and then hid it in a tin on the floor. We called in Mr. Symington and the medium, who groped his way to the centre of the room. Dr. Tyndall asked us to concentrate on the hiding-place of the cigar, and upon the person whose mouth had held it. We promised to do so. The medium walked slowly round the

room, touching several books on the shelves as he did so. Then he approached the committee and asked them to link their hands together. This was done and Dr. Tyndall completed the circle by holding the hands of the first and last in the group. He kept repeating, 'The cigar and the mouth! The cigar and the mouth!' Breaking away from the circle, the medium walked straight to the tin and discovered the cigar under it.

Having found the cigar, he—and we—now concentrated upon the 'mouth'. With the cigar in his hand (and, of course, still blindfolded) he slowly made the tour of the circle, stopping before one or two of the audience. He paused before Miss Beenham and murmured, 'No, it cannot be a lady', thus proving that he could 'see'—either hyperæsthetically or normally with his eyes. After 'testing' one or two more of the experimenters, he suddenly darted towards Mr. Fry (who had his mouth open!) and put the cigar in his mouth. The experiment was a success.

I then produced a new pack of cards in answer to a suggestion by Dr. Tyndall that he should show us certain experiments. He asked us to remove three of the cards from the pack, and, in his absence, touch some part of a person's body with them, and then hide them in different parts of the room. He undertook to find the person touched and the location of the hidden cards.

Dr. Dingwall and I took the medium out of the room, and thoroughly blindfolded him. On this occasion I used *my* bandage which I had made specially for these tests. In addition, the medium's eye-sockets were plugged with cotton wool, securely taped on. Dingwall and I then led him into the *séance*-room.

During our absence Mr. Jackson removed from the pack of cards the following: seven of diamonds, king of spades and the two of hearts. He touched Mr. Symington on the nose with the three cards. He then hid the seven of diamonds in the ninth volume in a row of books on a shelf marked R.I. The king of spades was hidden in Miss Beenham's note-book, and the two

of hearts was placed under a large lamp that was standing on a chair.

When we returned to the room Dr. Tyndall asked his audience to concentrate on where the cards were hidden. At first, he tried to find the cards without contacting anyone, and, groping round the room, touched several books on the shelves, also Miss Beenham's note-book. He remarked that he could get no impression and would like to hold someone's hand. He then took Mr. Jackson's hand, without knowing that it was he who had hidden the cards. (Neither Dingwall nor I knew who had hidden the cards.)

Immediately he took Mr. Jackson's hand, the medium exclaimed, 'I get the impression of books'. He went straight to one of the bookshelves (of which there are many stacks) and at once picked out the ninth book (which, of course, was the correct one) on row R1, and pushed it back again. He then took the book next to it (the eighth) and pushed that back. He again took the ninth book and, in his hesitation, half withdrew it and pushed it back twice. At the third time, he fully withdrew the book, opened it, and found the card (the seven of diamonds)—a brilliant piece of work, considering that there are more than 6000 books in the *séance*-room.

Still keeping contact with Mr. Jackson, he led this latter gentleman towards Miss Beenham, who was sitting at her note-taker's table, and passed his hand up and down in front of her face. Asking her to stand up, he took the note-book out of her hand, opened it, and found the second card (the king of spades). Groping his way round the room (and still holding Mr. Jackson's hand), he stopped opposite Mr. Symington, who was leaning against a bookcase. Thinking that this gentleman was in possession of the third card, he turned his pockets out, looked in the 'turn up' of his trousers, and made him take off his right shoe. Of course he failed to find the card, and suggested to Mr. Jackson that he was thinking of Mr. Symington. This was

denied. The medium immediately left Mr. Symington, groped his way towards the end of the room, stopped at the chair on which was the lamp, removed the lamp, and found the third card (the two of hearts). We had witnessed a very clever demonstration of muscle-reading.

Having found the cards, Dr. Tyndall stated that he would find the person touched *without* holding Mr. Jackson's hand. He was as good as his word, and went straight to Mr. Symington and placed his hand on his (Mr. Symington's) forehead, gradually lowering it until it rested on his nose. This was correct. It is easy to see how Mr. Jackson might have been thinking—subconsciously—of Mr. Symington (who had been touched with the cards) when Dr. Tyndall thought that a card was hidden upon him. This was very curious.

Dr. Tyndall then sprang a surprise on us. He said: 'I will now attempt to name the cards that were chosen.' He had not seen the cards, but they were handed to him, one by one, by Mr. Jackson. He guessed, or 'saw', the first card (the two of hearts) correctly; the seven of diamonds he thought was the six of diamonds; the third card was named as the four of spades, but he immediately corrected himself by saying: 'I cannot really see it; I don't know what it is.' It was the king of spades. The bandage was then removed, and the cotton wool and strap-pings were found to be undisturbed.

We continued with the card experiments. Dr. Tyndall was again bandaged, and the lights switched off. In the dark, Mr. Soal selected a card at random and handed it to the medium. Of course, no one in the room knew what it was. The medium said it was the eight of clubs. The lights were turned on, and we found the card was the eight of hearts. Dr. Tyndall had got the value right, but not the suit. A number of similar experiments were tried and often the suit was correct, or the number of pips was right; but the medium was not successful in guessing both suit and pips with the same card. But the good 'hits' re-

corded were suggestive of something more than mere chance. They were probably due to hyperæsthesia of the sense of touch, which I have discussed at some length when dealing with Marion.

In the above experiments no one in the room knew what the selected cards were, as they were chosen at random, in the dark. As a variant, Mr. Soal looked at a card and then, *in the dark*, handed it to the medium, who said it was the two of spades. It was the two of clubs. Both number and colour were correct, but not the suit. This concluded the experiments.

After reading the chapter on vaudeville mediums, the reader will have no difficulty in sharing in our conclusion that we had witnessed a very clever demonstration of muscle-reading, plus hyperæsthesia of some of the senses. In the case of the finding of the cigar and 'mouth', where the medium was not always in contact with one of the experimenters, it is certain that—consciously or unconsciously—he absorbed *indicia* unwittingly supplied to him by his audience. Of course, Marion does this, but he was never blindfolded during our experiments. In many ways Dr. McIvor-Tyndall is even more impressive than the Czechoslovak. Dr. Tyndall's performance was the more remarkable because—he informed us—he has not practised his 'telepathic' faculty for many years. If properly presented, muscle-reading appears very mysterious indeed to the uninitiated. But the faculty is more common than is usually supposed, and I know quite a number of people who can demonstrate it. The distinguished editor of *Nature*, Sir Richard Gregory, F.R.S., can 'muscle-read', as he informed me during a demonstration by Maloïtz, the 'singing medium' and hyperæsthete. But muscle-reading must not be confused with telepathy or clairvoyance, though it is often mistaken for these purely psychic faculties.



## XVII. A Tyrolean Night's Entertainment

**I**n June 1925, on my way to Vienna for some experiments with Willi Schneider, an account of which has already appeared in a previous book of memoirs,<sup>1</sup> I broke my journey at Innsbruck in order to ascertain whether the Tyrol boasted of any mediums.

They take only a very mild interest in matters psychic in the Tyrol. At Innsbruck I found there was a small spiritualist circle which met at infrequent intervals; and at Hall, a few miles out of the town, there lives a physical medium with whom I could not get in touch owing to his absence from home. But if there were no mediums in Innsbruck, there were mystifiers and mysteries—one of which I solved.

Before my visit I thought that if there was one place on this earth free from guile, that place was Innsbruck, where can be seen Nature in its most sublime—and sometimes most terrible—aspects, and where man, and the works of man, seem small and mean indeed. One would *expect* the truth at a place like Innsbruck, where the mountains, with their sheer precipices, thousands of feet high, seem only waiting for a favourable opportunity to topple over and bury the town. But it was at Innsbruck that I experienced one of the most curious deceptions I have ever encountered.

At a beer-hall or *Weinstube* there was billed to appear during my stay a company of 'Tyrolean peasants' who, for three nights, were going to entertain the simple folk of Innsbruck with 'mirth, music, and—miracles' (*Wunderwerke*). As I would go a considerable distance to see a 'miracle', the first night

<sup>1</sup>See *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*, by Harry Price, London, 1933, pp. 17-54.

found me an early visitor seated at a table, within twelve feet of the low platform on which the 'peasants' were going to entertain. The price of admission was one Austrian *Schilling* (7½d.), 'mit Bier'.

The performers numbered five, all men, who were dressed in the old and picturesque costumes of the Tyrolean mountaineers. The 'back cloth', hung on the wall at the end of the room, represented an exterior resembling a Swiss *châlet*, familiar to most of my readers. In front of the cloth was an ordinary wooden table, at which sat the men with a huge jug or *Stein* from which they frequently took copious draughts of amber-coloured Pilsner. No 'properties', except a sort of wooden sentry-box (which I will describe later), were visible. Truly, I thought, a very mundane setting for wonders which were advertised as *übernatürlich* (supernatural).

I will pass over the first part of the programme, which consisted of some really excellent music on guitars, zithers, accordions, etc., which accompanied their *Jodels*, songs common among the Swiss and Tyrolese shepherds. During the interval the wonder-workers, though claiming a special knowledge of the 'other world', apparently were in no hurry to go there, and methodically passed the hat round; after which very material proceeding the entertainment was resumed.

When the hat had been emptied and the beer-jug replenished, the leader of the party announced that one of his assistants had been gifted by Nature with powers which enabled him to read a person's thoughts 'even at a distance'; to decipher sealed messages without seeing them; to find stolen property; to discover hidden treasure and minerals; to tell a person's past and future, etc. In fact, this miracle-monger could do anything, apparently, except raise himself from the level of a fifth-rate beer-house performer. I awaited his act with interest, especially as the assistant (who turned out to be the accordion player) looked anything but psychic.

The leader of the troupe informed us (in German, English and Italian) that he would blindfold his assistant, who would then proceed to read the number of any watch while the case remained closed, the contents of a sealed letter, etc., and asked for tests. About fifty persons at once shouted that they had something for the mind-reader. The leader pointed out that time did not permit of his offering more than a few tests; and for the first experiment a young girl of about fourteen years of age, with flaxen hair and innocent-looking blue eyes, who was seated with her father and mother at the next table to mine, would be selected. I will add parenthetically that I had my watch on my table waiting for its number to be read, but the leader passed me by.

The young girl at the table had in her hand an unopened letter which she informed the audience had 'just come' by post, and that the sender was unknown to her. I could see the address was typewritten. After these particulars had been explained to the audience, the assistant on the 'stage' was then asked to do his best in reading the contents of the unopened letter. Without the least hesitation, and with no word being spoken by the leader, the wizard on the platform stated that the letter had been posted at Salzburg and was sent by a girl named Anna to her friend Theresa. The letter was typewritten, and the clairvoyant 'got an impression' that it was sent to Theresa thanking her for her kindness during a week-end visit. The leader then stated that he would have the letter opened and his assistant's words verified. Before the letter was handed over to the leader, I asked that I might be allowed to examine it—a request that met with instant compliance. I carefully inspected the post-mark, stamps and envelope, but could find nothing wrong with them. The letter was posted at Salzburg (ninety-nine miles from Innsbruck) the previous day, *by the early morning collection*, and I thought it curious that it should have taken nearly two days to reach the recipient, as the reader will

recollect that Theresa had 'only just' received it. But I made no comment, as anything can happen in Austria. I was convinced that the envelope had not been tampered with, and that I beheld the original sealing. The contents of the letter were read, and the little maiden blushingly acknowledged that everything the clairvoyant had said was correct—at which there was terrific applause, tattoos on tables with beer-mugs, etc.

I pondered over the experiment with mixed feelings. My first thoughts were, of course, that the 'test' was a 'frame up', and that collusion accounted for the seeming 'miracle', which was greater than any accomplished by Stéphan Ossowiecki, Bert Reese, or Ludwig Kahn (famous 'billet readers'). I repeat that I thought confederacy accounted for the phenomenon, but a glance at Theresa's innocent blue eyes and the stolid countenances of her parents partly reassured me.

The next test was given by an ex-soldier of one of the old Austrian regiments. It seems that during the Great War false teeth (both upper and lower sets) were—I was informed—made up in a series of fittings, numbered, embossed with the royal eagle, given out to the men who needed them, and regularly inspected with the rest of the soldier's kit. Our particular soldier had had an upper set presented to him (perhaps for good conduct), and he asked the clairvoyant if he could tell the number of it. Instantly came the reply No. 5434, Series No. 48B. The soldier acknowledged the correctness of the reply, removed his teeth, and passed them round for inspection. My theory of collusion was becoming more firmly established—until after the next test.

After the soldier had replaced his teeth, the manager then 'accepted' (he had refused quite a number of tests during his progress round the room) a small parcel which looked like a book from a benevolent-looking old gentleman, who apparently was well known among the audience as he was hailed with cheers and cries of delight. Curiously enough, I had seen this

man earlier in the day driving a procession of young boys through the town—evidently a schoolmaster. At last, I thought, here is a genuine test, free from the taint of collusion.

The parcel the schoolmaster held up (the manager never touched an article until after the conclusion of the experiment), looked like a flat octavo book, about eight by five inches, done up in a brown paper parcel and tied with string. He held the parcel above his head and requested the seer to tell him the contents. The fact that the assistant was blindfolded made no impression upon me. It is practically impossible to blindfold a person properly without employing drastic methods; but I certainly was curious as to how the 'clairvoyant' was going to see the contents of the parcel. The assistant admitted that the problem was a tough one, and insisted that the *Stein* be replenished. After a long pull at the contents, he said he thought he could manage it, and proceeded to become 'very entranced' as the manager put it; but this part of the performance was not at all convincing, though perhaps good showmanship. If the beer consumed during the *séance* had contained more than about two per cent. of alcohol, all the performers would have been 'entranced' long before they arrived at the second half of the entertainment.

After some minutes' silence on the part of the seer, he announced that he could see a number of people, mostly *ausländisch* (foreign), eating a meal. After describing other 'scenes' and 'visions', he at last told us that the parcel contained a number of forms which foreigners at Austrian hotels have to fill up for the police—the last thing in the world a schoolmaster would be likely to possess. Thereupon the *Oberlehrer* gracefully admitted that the parcel *did* contain police-forms (which he handed round) borrowed for the experiment from the friendly proprietor of a *Kosthaus* (boarding house).

A storm of applause greeted the result of the experiment, which of course entitled the chief actor to more liquid refresh-

ment. But I confess it left me more puzzled than ever. Of course I was convinced that the whole affair was trickery from start to finish, but—except for collusion—I had no theory how the trick was done, under the conditions. And I could *not* bring myself to believe that the headmaster of a school, holding a responsible position among young boys, would be willing to play into the hands of an itinerant mountebank. I marshalled my knowledge of the various codes and signals—silent (visual), talking, and electrical (telephonic or wireless)—used in acts of this description, but none would fit in with the conditions, and one could hardly see across the room for smoke—which would make the use of a visual code difficult. The Zancigs were not 'in it' with the simple "Tyrolean peasants"! Frankly, I was non-plussed, and was becoming impressed with the apparent skill of the troupe.

For the next experiment a light wooden 'sentry-box', open on one side only, and just large enough to contain a man, was dragged to the centre of the platform, with the *closed* side towards the audience. Into the box the assistant, still blindfolded, was placed. For the test, the leader accepted a closed bag from what proved to be a chemical student at the University. There was no mistake about his being a typical student; he had the usual scar across his cheek acquired by a fortunate slash at a recent *Mensur* or students' combat. The manager did not touch the bag, but asked the hidden assistant to name the contents. This he did very quickly, saying it was a gaseous chemical compound (I could not catch the name) contained in a large bottle. To prove it, the student opened his bag, pulled out a large amber-coloured bottle and removed the stopper. Consternation! A succession of coughs, tears and sneezes proved the correctness of the seer's answer, and a radius of several yards round the student was filled with an indignant crowd using their handkerchiefs, or what did duty for them. Those who were near the poison-gas were indignant; those farther away

were amused. Fortunately, being at the front of the room, I was one of the amused.

Two or three other tests concluded the performance. A local grocer (and hailed as such) brought a bottle of fruits, wrapped in paper. The answer was given correctly, with the added information that the fruits were packed by Eisler, of Vienna. An old lady with a shawl round her head wanted to know the number of her watch. Answer: 'The watch is a cheap one, and has no number.' Right. This last test ended a very interesting entertainment.

I left the *Stube* with the great mystery still unsolved. I was convinced that the persons (if confederates) who received tests were not of the ordinary type of 'assistant'. They were quite unlike the usual 'floor-workers', 'boosters', 'horses', 'gees', or 'ricks' attached to some similar shows, and I was awake half the night trying to worry the matter out. I could not bring myself to believe that the benevolent-looking *Oberlehrer* or the flaxen-haired Theresa with the innocent blue eyes were. . . . And here, at last, I fell asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next evening found me among the first to pay my *Schilling* for the entertainment; in fact, I was *the first* to enter the *Stube*, where I found the *übernatürlich* accordion-player in the far-from-supernatural occupation of sanding the floor. If I had discovered him laying down telephone wires, or installing a radio apparatus, I should have been better pleased. Soon after, the remainder of the troupe came in, and I think I detected a look of surprise on the face of the leader. He must have noticed my watch on the table in front of me.

The rapid filling of the room was accompanied by the still more rapid filling of the beer-mugs and the waiter's journey to the platform with the huge stone jug almost bursting with the quantity of Pilsner it contained.

The musical portion of the entertainment was concluded

sooner than on the previous evening, and the 'clairvoyant' started business just before nine o'clock. Again the manager refused to take my watch as a test (I noticed he had glanced at it several times during the previous hour), saying he would 'see me later'. He did, but not in the way he meant! The blind-folded assistant started off by naming the number of an Austrian Alpine Club ticket in a sealed envelope, handed up by a man whom I took to be some sort of railway official. Then he gave the correct number of cigarettes in a closed cigarette-case (and the owner's initials on the *inside* of the case), and several other tests—all correct. And the recipients of the tests were not the same people who had had tests on the previous evening, and were obviously persons of good standing in the town and quite above (one would have thought) being parties to a common swindle.

I left the room about ten o'clock just as perplexed as I had been on the previous evening. I had one theory only as to how the tricks (I was still convinced that they were tricks) were worked—and that seemed preposterous. Then I thought I would try and have a chat with the manager of the 'act', but on consideration I doubted if he would tell me anything. I even mentally calculated the cost of getting the troupe to England if I could persuade myself that the show was genuine—even genuine trickery. And *if* the 'phenomena' were *real*—what a 'find' for the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, of which I was then director.

As it was rather too early for me to go back to my hotel, I turned in at a large café garden on the beautiful Maria-Theresienstrasse for a cup of coffee. I had been there nearly an hour, listening to the music, when suddenly I heard sounds of laughter behind me (I had my back to the entrance to the garden). The laughter sounded a little familiar; so turning, I beheld to my amazement the manager of the "Tyrolean peasants" (but shorn of his glory in the shape of the picturesque Tyrolean costume)



with a number of the persons whose 'tests' had proved so interesting. *The secret was out!* Each 'guest' was equipped with a *Stein* of beer in front of him—except the manager, who had apparently brought his big jug with him. The young chemical student was there talking and laughing with the fair (but frail!) Theresa, whose blue eyes seemed less innocent-looking than on the previous evening, though her parents were as stolid as ever. The benevolent-looking *Oberlehrer* was apparently telling a good story to the railway official, and everyone appeared to be enjoying himself. By the time I had recovered from my surprise the manager of the troupe had seen me, and I think that the astonishment was mutual. He stared at me for some few seconds, when I slowly withdrew my watch from my pocket and dangled it on its chain in front of me. This was too much for him. He burst out laughing, and, excusing himself, came over to me. He told me, in excellent English (but with an American accent), that if I would wait for a few minutes, he would send his 'party' off, and have a chat. His method of getting rid of his useful 'assistants' was by having their mugs refilled and telling them to hurry up. This they did, and we were soon by ourselves.

After his big jug had been replenished (this time at my expense), he unburdened himself. To make it easier for him I told him that whether the phenomena were real or otherwise, I was 'in the profession' either way, and any secrets he might entrust to me would be sacred. He said he had no secrets, with which statement I was by then in entire agreement. I asked him how he succeeded in getting such a good class of 'booster' for his entertainment, and he told me he had not the slightest trouble in getting all the people he wanted. A few complimentary tickets and a promise of 'free beer' procured for him all the assistants necessary, and they invariably came from the middle or upper middle classes. He always preceded his show by a day or two before it was billed to open, and at once visited the

cafés, etc., where he found all the material he required. He said the Church looked askance at the real phenomena (which he had seen in Czechoslovakia) but tolerated his show which, I gently reminded him, was based on lies, deception and fraud, and was the most outrageous entertainment I had ever seen. He admitted the soft impeachment. He said his helpers entered into the spirit of the thing. I asked him if they never talked to their friends about their part of the performance. 'They do,' he replied, 'but the people in the Tyrol are very simple, and notice nothing wrong.' I replied that after my experience at his entertainment I did not consider the Tyrolese particularly unsophisticated! I asked him to explain the mystery of the blue-eyed Theresa's letter, and whether it had been first opened and the contents read. He replied that the letter had *not* been opened (thus confirming my judgment), but Theresa had been expecting a letter from her girl friend (who had stayed with her the previous week-end) employed at an office in Salzburg, and she guessed the purport of it without opening it. The letter had arrived, as I thought it should have done, by the *first* delivery on the morning of the 'test', and Theresa herself suggested it as a good 'experiment'. I again told my friend that I failed to see where the 'simplicity' of the Tyrolese came in, and that my faith in innocent blue eyes had been shattered for ever. Especially when accompanied by flaxen hair!

My friend informed me that he was born in Prague, had travelled widely, and had spent six years in the United States, where he had acquired the *modus operandi* of 'putting over' (his own term) the second-sight act. He had seen Bert Reese (famous American billet-reader), and failed to catch him in any deception. There were many mediums in Czechoslovakia, and he had seen some 'real miracles' there. He would not tell me his name. 'My real name is of no interest to you, and I have almost forgotten it,' he said, 'and my stage name I change as often as my clothes. One week we are Tyrolean peasants; the next,

Hungarian gypsies; then Russian refugees, and so on—according to where we are playing. I make about twenty dollars per week profit, and like the life.' I asked him a last question: 'Do any of your assistants ever let you down?' 'Never,' he replied. I then told him I thought he must have some extraordinary secret by which he gained the confidence and goodwill of his amateur helpers; some subtle power by means of which he could divert respectable schoolmasters from the straight and narrow path. 'No,' he replied in his best American-German, 'it is done *mit Freundlichkeit und frei Bier*.' Certainly, there was nothing ambiguous about the beer!

## XVIII. *Adventures with a Showman-Hypnotist*

It was with no thought of 'experiences' or psychic adventures that I decided to spend the summer vacation of 1926 in the Bernese Oberland, and my journey to Interlaken was taken solely in the pursuit of health and pleasure. But my guardian angel, who never misses an opportunity of thrusting an adventure upon me, was apparently in fine fettle, and I had not traversed the beautiful Hoheweg promenade more than twice when I was attracted by a sandwich-man carrying a huge poster inviting the public to view a film revealing the wonders of *Hypnose und Suggestion*, and the audience was promised *Ein Blick in die Tiefen der Seele—Der Film vom Unbewussten* (a peep into the depths of the soul—the film of the subconscious). To see this *Kulturfilm*—as it was termed—quite a small sum was demanded, and I mentally resolved to present myself at the Adlerhalle (where the film was being shown for one week) at the first opportunity.

Cinemas and heat-waves do not mix at all well, and several times I put off my visit to the Adlerhalle in order that I might witness the *Kulturfilm* in comfort. But the tropical heat continued and on the evening I eventually visited the hall the thermometer had recorded a day temperature of 92° Fahrenheit in the shade. So it will be gathered that the night was hot.

The Adlerhalle, Interlaken, is—for a Swiss town—a large hall and holds about five hundred people. The film was due to be shown at 8.30 p.m. and just before that hour I climbed the short stairway leading to the hall. At the top of the stairs a girl was taking the money—at least, she was there for that purpose had any money been forthcoming. But she told me that only

one other person had applied for admission and he was in the hall waiting for the audience to arrive. She sorrowfully informed me that unless the audience grew somewhat the film would not be shown. As apparently the visitors to the Swiss resort were more concerned in keeping themselves cool than in having the 'depths of the soul' revealed to them, I was not really surprised that at nine o'clock the 'house' was still of the same meagre proportions. Even the fact that 'young people' under eighteen years of age were not being permitted to view the film did not on this occasion have the effect of filling the building. At this juncture the young man in the hall had his money returned to him, and I was told definitely that the film would not be shown that evening. I said I was very disappointed.

Before I took my departure it occurred to me to ask for the manager, as I thought he might be able to give me some information concerning the film. He was fetched by the girl cashier and entered the hall accompanied by a young man about twenty years old. The manager introduced himself as Dr. med. Gaston Haas, of St. Just, Zurich, and he apologised—in excellent English—for the fact that he could not show me the film. I again expressed my disappointment, at the same time presenting him with my card. Upon learning the fact that I was professionally interested in psychic matters, he became exceedingly affable and we had a long chat about psychical research, spiritualism and occult things in general. He claimed acquaintance with the late Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, the late Dr. Geley, Fritz Grunewald (who was then still living), etc. He also informed me that he was a hypnotist and that part of his entertainment was the conducting of experiments in hypnotism and suggestion. There was no indication of this portion of his programme in the posters I saw advertising the show. 'Dr. Haas' may have been merely a *nom de théâtre*—I refrained from inquiring too closely. Real doctors in England do not tour the country with

cinematograph shows, but things are not quite the same on the Continent. Dr. Haas asked me if I would care to see the experimental portion of his show, and I gave a glad affirmative in reply.

It does not often fall to the lot of the psychic investigator to be the recipient of a private entertainment given by a public showman, and I felt flattered. Dr. Haas informed me that his 'company' consisted of his girl cashier, who also played the piano during the running of the film; the young man assistant (whom I had already seen), who was his principal 'subject' and operator of the cinematograph projector; and himself as lecturer-demonstrator. At 9.30 p.m. on Saturday, July 17, 1926, we were all ready to commence what I am afraid I must term the entertainment.

The young man assistant seated himself on a common wooden chair in front of the white screen. He was told to gaze at the doctor's eyes and did so. Immediately the doctor simultaneously clapped his hands, stamped his foot, and shouted out '*schlafen*' (sleep), and the youth stiffened himself up in the chair, at the same time showing only the whites of his eyes, which became fixed. Dr. Haas told the youth to remove his coat and turn up his right shirt sleeve. This the youth did quite automatically, at the same time putting out his arm at right angles to his body. The doctor now drew two parallel chalk lines, about six inches apart, on the youth's forearm. He informed me that he would render insensible to pain the portion of arm between the two lines. He now produced a fine steel needle (on a wooden handle) which he proceeded to sterilise with some liquid. With the needle he several times pricked the portion of the arm not rendered insensible, and each time the youth jerked his arm away as he felt the point of the needle. The hypnotist now informed me that he would plunge the needle through the youth's arm and that no pain would be felt as that portion had been rendered insensible by suggestion. Selecting that portion

of the arm between the two chalk marks, the doctor took hold of some loose flesh between his fingers and pierced it with the needle. I carefully watched the youth's face during the penetration of the needle, and he unmistakably winced—in fact, he violently started. I imagined that one was supposed to keep one's eyes fixed on the needle during this part of the performance. The doctor then withdrew the needle and sterilised the small punctures that had been made. The hypnotist now gave a shout and the boy 'awakened'. The youth then left the hall and returned after a few minutes.

The next experiment was in post-hypnosis. During the hypnotic sleep of the youth the doctor had willed that five minutes after he awoke he was to go to a certain spot on the platform, pick up a small Spanish onion, imagine it to be a peach—and eat it. I had carefully noted the time which had elapsed after the boy became normal, and at five minutes fifty seconds after the doctor had awakened him he went over to the stage and picked up the onion, which he commenced eating with avidity, at the same time smacking his lips. The doctor asked him what he thought of it. The youth—who appeared absolutely normal—replied that it was the best peach he had ever tasted. The doctor then suggested that it was not a peach, but an onion. The youth instantly made a wry face, spat out the onion and rushed to the door for some water. By the time he had reached the door the doctor suggested that what he was eating was not an onion, but a peach. More smacking of lips, the boy remarking that the 'peach' was almost 'too sweet'. These alternating suggestions continued, and my own impression is that the boy overdid this part of the performance.

After the onion experiment the boy sat down again and became 'hypnotised' at a shout from the doctor, his limbs appearing to be rigid and his eyes fixed. The hypnotist then produced a box of pepper which he asked me to taste. It certainly was pepper, though not very hot; it was probably much

adulterated with arrowroot. The doctor then told me that he would give a large spoonful to the youth, at the same time suggesting that it was sugar. This was done, the boy chewing it up with real—or assumed—relish. Before he had quite finished, the doctor 'suggested' that it was not sugar, but pepper, and the youth immediately made some facial contortions and spat out the remainder of the pepper. The doctor then took a spoonful of fine white sugar (which I tasted) and held it to the boy's nose, telling him it was pepper. He at once had a violent sneezing fit. Then the doctor said it was sugar and tipped it into the mouth of the boy, who commenced to swallow it—until told by the hypnotist that it was pepper, when it was immediately spat out with an exclamation of disgust. I am afraid that these onion-cum-peach-cum-pepper experiments were not at all convincing. The 'business' was overdone. I must confess to a plebeian fondness for onions and pepper, and I was thinking—as I was getting hungry—how well they would have tasted accompanied by a little local *Gruyères*.

At this point in the entertainment two men entered the hall. It appears that Dr. Haas had advertised to relieve various ailments by hypnosis and had invited the public to come and be cured. The two men (only one was a patient), thinking that the film was being shown, had turned up to see the doctor. They were asked to remain, and the ailing one was requested to come to the front. He gave his name as Charles Frey, a furniture dealer, of Interlaken. His ailment—he stated—was a stiff neck caused by a nervous disease which had commenced fifteen months previously and which was getting more acute. He had tried many doctors—including five at Bern—who had been unable to do anything for him. His friend confirmed these various statements. Herr Frey, aged forty-one, certainly looked as if his neck were stiff by the way he carried his head. He could turn it, he told us, only with the assistance of his hands. Herr Frey was asked to sit down by the platform. He did so, and was



told to gaze into the eyes of the doctor who at the same time made a few passes around the head of his patient. Then a sudden shout on the part of the hypnotist and Herr Frey was asleep—but not rigid. Dr. Haas then asked his patient a number of questions concerning his complaint which were all answered coherently—too coherently, I thought. After five minutes of questioning the doctor told Herr Frey to turn his head slowly to the right, then to the left, then up, then down, repeating these orders about a dozen times. They were obeyed instantly. After a few minutes of these exercises, Herr Frey was asked how he felt. 'Fine', he told the doctor, who now left his patient in the hypnotic sleep while he turned his attention to the youth again.

Dr. Haas again hypnotised his assistant in the manner already described and told him that *he* was the doctor and that he was to prescribe for the Herr furniture dealer, at the same time suggesting that the youth should ask Herr Frey how old his mother was and a number of similar silly questions, some of which proved too much for the risible faculties of the boy, who could not help giving a hearty—though alleged hypnotic—laugh. Herr Frey did not answer. The assistant was then told that he was the lecturer, and was directed to explain the imaginary film to the non-existent audience. This he did quite well, having seen the film hundreds of times. The youth was then awakened by another shout and a stamp of the foot.

Dr. Haas next turned his attention to Herr Frey (who was still asleep on the chair) and put him through some more exercises with a view of restoring his neck to normal. After five minutes Herr Frey told the 'audience' that he felt better, after which the doctor said he would hypnotise the boy again.

The next experiment with the youth was nothing more than a card trick. On the platform was a pack of cards and an ordinary slate which, previous to the entertainment, I had taken the liberty of turning over. On the underside was chalked a heart and the number 10. After the boy had been put to sleep

he was handed a pack of cards and was told to make an 'experiment' with them to the imaginary audience. The youth stood up, went to the front of the platform and shuffled the cards, asking a spectator to draw one, at the same time explaining what he was going to do. At this juncture Dr. Haas called the youth's attention to the fact that at the end seat of the fifth row was a rude person making grimaces at the lecturer, and told him to put him out. The youth immediately jumped off the platform, rushed to the seat indicated, had a scuffle with the imaginary interrupter in the empty chair, went through the pantomime of struggling with a person down the length of the hall and pushed his invisible captive through one of the exits. The youth, very hot and flurried, returned to the stage and continued the experiment with the cards, faces down, which he again shuffled and presented to his 'audience'. Dr. Haas took a card—which I noticed was 'forced' in the usual way, except that here the 'forcee' of course was a willing dupe, making no effort to avoid the card presented to his easy grasp—and showed me what he had drawn. I was not surprised to see he had 'chosen' the ten of hearts.

After the card trick (there is really no other name for it) the youth was directed to go over to the piano (in one of the side aisles) on which the girl assistant usually played, and was told to turn the leaves of the music for the young lady. This was an excellent piece of pantomime, the youth going through the action of turning the leaves, with appropriate pauses while the imaginary page was being played. He remarked how well the girl played, and in my opinion this rather spoilt the effect. The youth was now awakened by the doctor's shouting at him from a distance.

Herr Frey next called for the doctor's attention and—still sleeping—was put through the usual exercises. He was told by Dr. Haas that after three visits (for which the doctor received no payment) the man would be permanently cured. Herr Frey

was then awakened by a shout and a stamp of the foot, at the same time as a pass was made upwards from the man's waist.

Dr. Haas now informed me that he would simultaneously hypnotise Frey and his assistant. The youth and the man were placed on two chairs on the stage and the doctor held up a small mirror before their eyes, telling them to gaze at it steadily. In about a minute both appeared to be asleep. The doctor termed this experiment 'collective hypnosis' and stated that he could simultaneously affect a number of persons in the same way. Herr Frey was now awakened, but the youth was told that he had both his legs in splints, and that he was to walk off the platform into the auditorium. The boy's legs at once shot out straight and stiff and the hypnotist assisted him to rise from the chair. He was then able to shuffle along, but had to be lifted (by the doctor) off the platform. He was then awakened.

Herr Frey and his friend now left us (it was 10.45). The furniture dealer's neck now appeared normal; at least, he could move his head freely. I invited the doctor and his two assistants to partake of some liquid refreshment, and we four adjourned to the café below the hall, where we remained about an hour.

The doctor now informed me that he was determined that I should see the *Kulturfilm* if he had to show it to an empty hall, and invited me to the Adlerhalle for the following evening at 8.30. He said he would beat up the hotels and try to get some sort of an audience. During our chat he clasped his girl assistant's hands together and defied her to part them. She tried and said she could not. He also put his male assistant to sleep just as the boy was about to quaff his Pilsner. Amusing, but not convincing.

Dr. Haas and I parted very good friends and I thanked him for his kindness in giving me the special entertainment which I have described. As a showman, Dr. Haas is entitled to make his entertainment as interesting as possible, but I must confess that I

was not at all impressed by his 'experiments' on his male assistant. One knows that hypnosis is used extensively by medical men, and I have seen many examples of this kind. I have seen also many of the alleged hypnotic feats of the itinerant showmen, tricks made possible by the employment of confederates—'boosters', 'floor-walkers', or 'horses' as they are called in the profession—and I must confess that the antics of Dr. Haas's assistants were much more like the simulated article than the real. Everything the boy did could have been done by him in a normal manner. It is not particularly painful to have a sharp needle thrust through the loose skin of one's forearm, especially when that skin is pinched tightly—a proceeding which deadens the nerves. And there are many lads who would be glad to earn a small weekly pittance by eating onions and pretending they were peaches. I was not asked to assist in any of the experiments; I was merely a guest and spectator.

Concerning Herr Frey I cannot make up my mind. I made some enquiries the following morning and found that there was such a person in the town; also that he was in the furniture business, but I could gather no further information concerning him in the limited time I had at my disposal. He may have been genuinely afflicted—and cured—but it seems curious (and unlikely) that a man capable of curing in an hour what had defied several doctors for fifteen months should be content to limit his powers to small provincial halls and hotel *foyers*. But Herr Frey appeared genuine and answered all questions without hesitation. Confederacy is a very curious and interesting subject, as I discovered during my Innsbruck adventure—an experience in many ways similar to the one I have herewith recorded, and with which the reader is already acquainted. In the end I decided to give Herr Frey the benefit of the doubt, with the mental reservation that I would look him up if ever I was in Interlaken again.

I arrived in good time for Sunday's performance and was able to glean from Dr. Haas a good deal of information concerning the *Kulturfilm*.

*Ein Blick in die Tiefen der Seele* was produced (in 1923) under the immediate direction of Dr. Curt Thomalla in conjunction with the Berlin nerve specialist, Dr. A. Kronfeld. Others who assisted in the production include Professor Adam, Geh. Med.-Rat Paasch, Professor Bosch, Dr. med. Wolff, Frau Dr. med. Korzarowa, Theodor Kappstein, Rolf Brandt, Dr. Kossowski, and Professor Max Dessoir (professor of philosophy at Berlin University), who writes an introduction to the brochure which was issued when the film was released. The names of its sponsors are sufficient guarantee that the film is intended to be serious.

By nine o'clock on the Sunday evening about thirty stragglers had assembled in the Adlerhalle and the doctor decided to commence. The young man who had had his money returned on the previous evening was again present, and we sat together. He told me his name was Gore and that he was an undergraduate of Worcester College, Oxford.

*Ein Blick in die Tiefen der Seele* is a long film divided into seven parts. Dr. Haas read a lengthy introduction to the film, and between each two sections said a few words about Mesmer, the fourth dimension, etc. During the intervals between the parts he also carried out some experiments, which were accompanied by some most inappropriate music by his girl assistant acting as pianist. To prevent a break in continuity I will first describe the seven sections of the film, which is of absorbing interest.

Section one is devoted, first, to diagrammatic working models of the central nervous system and 'sympathetic nerve system'. Then come some weird and wonderful mechanical models of the heart beating, the working of the digestive organs (the movements of which were accompanied by a lively jazz tune

from the pianist), etc. After that we are shown working diagrams illustrating the conscious and subconscious—or subliminal—mind. We next see a chart illustrating the working of the mind during sleep, with a photographic story of a girl somnambulist whose sleep-walking escapade has led her to a precarious position on a balcony; we see also what caused her to go to that particular spot. The very narrow division between genius and madness is exemplified by pictures of the young Beethoven holding a number of persons spellbound by his art and the dismal picture of the madman in his cell. The higher expressions of the mind or 'soul' are depicted by some young girls performing classical dances, and by a typical 'spring poet' descanting to a number of gambolling lambs. Another amusing animated drawing designed to illustrate absent-mindedness is the picture of a man reading a newspaper while standing in the centre of a busy thoroughfare. He is so engrossed in the print he is reading that he does not see a motor-car which dashes right up to him and nearly knocks him down. The driver shouts and blows his horn, but the man is quite oblivious to the threatened danger. Suddenly a louder blast on the motor horn strikes a responsive note in the mind of the man who almost collapses as he realises his imminent danger. Immediately after we see a working diagram of the man's nervous system showing the effect of the sudden shock.

Section two continues to portray graphically the workings of the subconscious mind. We first see a man's head divided into two compartments. In the upper compartment we see the man himself pursuing his usual vocation—that of an author—occasionally thrusting through a trap-door into his subliminal self some sensory 'impression' which later he would automatically drag up from below when a visual or other impression vivified the forgotten incident. The thing was cleverly conceived and arranged, but it is difficult to describe on paper. We next see the effects of 'conscience' on the subliminal self as

expressed in repose. One picture shows us an innocent young girl in bed peacefully sleeping and the next the fratricide tossing about in uneasy slumber on his guilty couch. The effects of auto-suggestion are shown, reminding one of the cures of Coué and similar healers, faith healers, Lourdes and contemporary miraculous 'cures', etc.—this being typically German, by the way.

Section three deals with another phase of absent-mindedness and is illustrated by the picture of a girl finishing her toilet and trying to read a novel at the same time. This 'divided attention' is responsible for her putting on and removing her shoes and stockings two or three times over. Then we have exemplified the potent effects of personality. We see pictures of the orator and the advocate holding the masses spellbound. Then incidents depicting pictorially mass psychology and the madness of crowds. Then the wonders of hypnotism.

Section four is devoted to the different methods and phases of hypnosis. Then the reflex action of the nerves is explained by mechanical diagrams showing that the effect is produced by the transmission of an afferent impulse to a nerve centre and its reflection thence as an efferent impulse independently of volition, seen most commonly in the involuntary and instantaneous motion of winking when the eyes are threatened by danger; also exhibited in continuous alternation in walking, and including all acquired habits so far as they become automatic. We are then shown a sphygmograph (an instrument which marks, by means of a recording lever when applied over the heart or an artery, the character of the pulse, and its rate, force and variations) at work recording on a revolving smoked drum the difference in the pulse-rate of a subject before and during hypnosis. The rate was much slower during the hypnotic sleep. After this we are shown the different stages and states of the phenomenon of catalepsy, and mechanical diagrams of the vasomotor nerve system. From catalepsy to the feats of the

fakirs is a natural sequence, and this section of the film concludes with a very realistic—but rather unpleasant—exhibition of the tricks popularised in Europe by Tahra Bey and other fakirs. Knives passed through both cheeks, stilettos inserted through the neck, tongue, arm, etc., and a man's hand nailed to a board are features presented to show a person's insensibility to pain during the hypnotic or cataleptic state. Walking bare-foot on broken glass is also shown.

Section five is devoted to dreams and dream states. We are shown animated pictures of persons asleep and are told what they were dreaming about, the assertion being made that the expression on the face of the dreamer is an index to the subject of the dream. For instance, we are shown the picture of a beautiful lady with a beatific expression on her face which denoted—it was said—that the sleeping beauty was dreaming of a new gown she was acquiring; then we see the picture of a male sleeper with 'remorse' writ large on his countenance, with an inset miniature of a young girl appealingly raising an infant to the restless sleeper—a 'story without words' doubtless intended to point a moral.

Section six is composed of a series of photographs of hypnotic subjects taken when they were under control and performing their various feats, some of which were 'duplicated' by Dr. Haas at his entertainment. Some interesting experiments in post-hypnosis are portrayed on the screen.

Section seven, the final portion of the film, deals with the curative effect of hypnosis in cases of nerve disorders, paralysis, St. Vitus's dance, etc.; and various 'cases' and their methods of treatment are shown to the audience. Then come the uses of hypnosis in the treatment of criminals and the prevention of crime. A scena depicting a young girl 'willed' to remove a paper surreptitiously from a man's pocket, is exhibited in order to point out that the girl had to be a willing party to the experiment and that no hypnotist could break down the *morale* of a



person; the cleverest exponent could not turn an honest person into a pickpocket. The film ends by sounding a warning note against unqualified and unauthorised persons dabbling in the art of the hypnotist. Hypnotism had won for itself an important place in therapeutics: it was dangerous in the hands of the ignorant or charlatan.

The film is intensely interesting from start to finish and is well staged with the usual Teutonic thoroughness. The mechanical effects are clever, and considerable ingenuity has been expended in the production of the *Kulturfilm*.

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During the intervals Dr. Haas made his usual experiments, some of which I have already described. I had asked him whether Herr Frey was coming that evening to be cured all over again, but he said he had given him 'treatment' the same morning and that he would not attend the evening's entertainment.

An experiment I had not seen the previous evening was made by the doctor. He sent his assistant to sleep by the usual shout, and gradually made passes and strokes up the back of the boy, who gradually became stiff and rigid. He was then placed between two chairs, the head resting on the edge of one, his feet on the other—the so-called 'cataleptic bridge'. This may have been an abnormal feat, but I find that I can do it normally. The girl assistant was then sent to sleep as she sat at the piano, and she at once played a piece with her eyes closed. I am afraid this did not impress anyone as the girl had been playing from memory in the dark for two hours or more.

Dr. Haas then called for volunteer subjects and especially asked that any member of the audience having an ailment should come forward. A young man at once went up and said he suffered from deafness and asthma. The doctor put the youth under control, but little progress was made with the asthma. The deafness was in the right ear, to which Dr. Haas held his watch. The youth said he heard it ticking. The doctor

then went to various parts of the hall to the right of the 'patient' and repeatedly called out, 'Can you hear me?' to which question the boy answered usually in the affirmative. The young man was then awakened and said he heard better than when he entered the hall. At the time I wondered if it were another example of auto-suggestion.

My acquaintance, Mr. Gore, then went up to the platform and submitted to the will of the doctor. He did not sit down and was asked to close his eyes. Thus he did while the doctor made the usual passes, etc. He was then given a little salt and sugar and asked if he could distinguish between them. He said he could. The fleshy part of his right forearm was then lightly nipped with a pair of forceps, and he was asked if it hurt him. Mr. Gore said it did not. Discussing the experiment afterwards Mr. Gore told me that he was normally conscious during the whole of the experiment, but felt it easier to acquiesce to some degree in the wishes of the doctor than to refuse altogether. The experiment was not very successful. I was about to offer myself as a subject when we discovered it was past eleven o'clock, and that it was time to close.

I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Haas's entertainment, which I have described at some length as these peripatetic practitioners are rarely seen in Europe nowadays, though forty or fifty years ago they were fairly common. The modern public seems little interested in this particular phase of the occult, which is eminently suitable for representation upon the screen. Should any of my readers have the opportunity of witnessing *Ein Blick in die Tiefen der Seele*, I strongly advise them to see the film, which I can thoroughly recommend. And even the other side of Dr. Haas's work is not without interest to one whose ability to discriminate between genuineness and fraud is an essential part of his equipment; for such ability thrives best when it gets a reasonable amount of exercise in *both* directions. Time spent at a 'show' like this one is by no means time wasted.

## XIX. 'The Man with the X-ray Eyes'

The possibility of paroptic perception, extra-retinal vision, pseudo-vision—or, in simpler language, eyeless sight—has intrigued a number of distinguished scientists and others for many years. Such men as Henri Bergson, Leon Brunschvicq, Charles Richet, Anatole France, E. Boirac, and Lombroso have, from time to time, experimented with a view to ascertaining whether a person can see by means other than the normal organs of vision. The literature of the subject is scanty, but at least one student, M. Jules Romain (Louis Farigoule) has published a monograph on eyeless sight which is extremely interesting. The title of his book is *Vision Extra-Rétinienne*, and there is an English translation.<sup>1</sup> Romain assumed that as somnambulistic subjects can, apparently, guide themselves with remarkable ease, with eyes closed or even bandaged, they may 'acquire a prodigious delicacy of sensation, and know how to make use of a thousand signs which a man in a waking state passes by without notice. Their hearing, touch, and smell undergo "hyperæsthetic" change and manage sometimes to take the place of sight.' Believing that these conditions could be induced or developed in certain people, he experimented with several blinded victims of the War and others, and claims some remarkable successes. Romain invented apparatus designed to eliminate all objects except the one used in the experiment, and found that his first subject, a blind soldier named Michel, 'recognised the digit 4, which was about eight centimetres high, with lines one centimetre thick, placed under glass'. Michel

<sup>1</sup>*Eyeless Sight: a Study of Extra-Retinal Vision and the Paroptic Sense*, by Jules Romain, London, Putnam, 1924.

succeeded in following with his finger the outline of the figure under the glass. With another subject, a Madame X, he obtained some amazing results. The woman was not blind, but was blindfolded by a number of eminent doctors who asserted that they were completely satisfied with the conditions, and quite convinced that the woman did possess paroptic vision. This is not the place to follow M. Romain through his many experiments, or to criticise his technique; but undoubtedly he convinced some Parisian scientists that the abnormal faculty of eyeless sight had been demonstrated.

The above introduction is necessary in order to emphasise that reading, drawing, etc., while blindfolded has been studied

عروف سے۔ بی۔ کیو۔ ڈیوڈ

Professor K. B. Duke

خدا بخش

Kuda Bux

Kuda Bux's signatures, in Kashmiri characters

scientifically and has been demonstrated in the laboratory as well as on the music-hall stage. But 'eyeless sight', as the public know it, is exclusively confined to vaudeville acts and to purposes of entertainment: even in this field there are few exponents, and usually they are quite unconvincing. But at least one man, Kuda Bux (professionally known as 'Professor K. B. Duke'), has provided London with a most interesting entertainment and has been studied by the scientists. He calls himself 'the man with the X-ray eyes'.

Kuda Bux arrived in London in the spring of 1935, and my desk soon became littered with Press-cuttings concerning his

feats. He is a Muhammadan from Kashmir, and was born at Akhnur on October 15, 1905. He comes from a respectable family and his father is an official in the engineering department of the State. Although he more or less maintains himself by the performance of his peculiar feats, he is not entirely dependent on his profession for a living. He told me (in excellent English) that he was attracted to 'magic' when a boy, and discovered that he possessed extra-retinal vision at the age of thirteen. When he was twenty-two he commenced to demonstrate his faculty, which, he informed me, was perfected four years later, *i.e.* in 1931. That is his story.

Undoubtedly Kuda Bux is a remarkable man and has an engaging personality. His repertoire of feats includes blindfold reading, drawing, card-playing, etc. He will eat a bundle of hay if placed before him. He will consent to be buried alive (in an ordinary grave, with just a board over his face) for a limit of three hours. He will—apparently—stop his heart and pulse at request, and demonstrated this trick in my office. He will drink poison. He has performed the classic fire-walk on many occasions, and he can handle live coals. His versatility is extraordinary.

When I read the accounts of his performances, I at once wrote to him. I considered that he was a suitable subject for observation by the University of London Council for Psychological Investigation, and I requested him to give us a demonstration. He consented, and refused to take a fee for his services. I called the council together.

Kuda Bux met the University Council and others on Wednesday, July 10, 1935, at 2.30 in the afternoon. Unfortunately, being end of term, several of the council could not be present owing to examinations or holidays, but the following attended the experiments: Mrs. Burt (wife of Professor Dr. Cyril Burt); Professor Dr. William McDougall, F.R.S. (who was on vacation from Duke University, North Carolina); Mr. C. E. M. Joad; Mr. R. S. Lambert; Mr. S. G. Soal, of Queen Mary

College, and the present writer. Notes of the experiments were made by the council's secretary, Miss Ethel Beenham.

The hour arrived for the test, and then came the puzzle: how could we blindfold Kuda Bux so that his normal vision could not be utilised in any way? Among those present, I was supposed to know most about blindfold tricks, and I was asked to do the job. But *because* I am conversant with various methods of blindfolding, I know that it is the most difficult thing in the world to prevent a person using his eyes, employing the ordinary bandages, etc. Something hardly less drastic than a surgical operation is necessary in order to stop a person seeing. However, I consented to blindfold Kuda Bux. We had provided ourselves with surgical bandages, surgical adhesive tape, pads of cotton wool, and a special tie-on bandage or mask composed of two thicknesses of heavy black cloth, between which was sandwiched a layer of cotton wool. Curiously enough, Kuda Bux brought with him almost identical bandaging materials, in addition to a lump of fresh dough. We commenced the proceedings by squeezing a lump of dough into each eye-socket. Over the dough we placed pads of cotton wool. Over the wool we put strips of adhesive tape, crossing from the superciliary arch to the cheekbone. Round the head and upper part of the face of Kuda Bux we wound a surgical bandage. Over this I placed the special black mask, which I tied on with two pieces of thick tape. His head and face were swathed in bandages, with only the nostrils and mouth free. He was now ready to demonstrate.

During the blindfolding, Kuda Bux sat at our *séance*-room table, facing his audience. Still seated, he asked for a book to be placed before him in the ordinary reading position. Walking to a bookcase, I chose the first book that came to my hand, opened it at random, and placed it on the table in front of Kuda Bux. I put my finger on a paragraph, and asked him to read it aloud. This he did at once, almost as quickly as the reader is perusing

this page. There was no sign of hesitation. Other books were placed in front of him, some with large print and some with small. He read them all.

To say that we were surprised is to put it very mildly indeed. We were impressed with the fact that a man, so bandaged, could see at all, to say nothing of reading, and we thought that perhaps we had left a loophole somewhere, and that our blindfolding technique was not so good as we imagined. So I asked Professor McDougall if he would make an attempt at binding the man's head. Professor McDougall is a psychologist, but he is also a doctor of medicine, and I thought he would make a better job of the bandaging. He said he would try. He (assisted by Mrs. Burt) then blindfolded Kuda Bux again, using the dough, cotton wool, bandages, tape and black mask. Over all was placed a black scarf. As before, the nostrils and mouth were left free.

With hand on forehead, Kuda Bux sat in the same position as during the previous test, and read my books with astonishing ease and accuracy. Then I wrote something on a piece of paper, which was placed before him: he read it at once. After that, he turned sideways in his chair and Mr. Lambert wrote a short sentence on the table behind his back: he immediately identified it, though we were not quite certain that his head was sufficiently turned away from the writer of the sentence for him not to have read the writing in the same way as he read the books. This last test was supposed to be a demonstration of his 'seeing' behind his back. As a final experiment, we wrapped a black cloth completely round his head, excluded the daylight from the *séance*-room, and then asked him to tell us whether the electric light was on or off—moving the switch up and down in order to test him. In this experiment he was not successful.

I am quite certain that the intelligent reader who has been interested in my story is already saying to himself: 'Why all this fuss about blindfolding Kuda Bux? Why all this excitement



THEIR FUTURE: NEWS OF THE

*Kuda Bux, blindfolded, duping among shorthand characters drawn on a blackboard*  
by another person





about dough, surgical tape and cotton bandages? Why on earth didn't they put the man's head in a thick black bag, tie the mouth of the bag round his neck and tell him to get on with it?' Now the answer to these very natural queries sounds rather startling: the reason we did not do these things was because Kuda Bux claims that he *sees through, or by means of, his nostrils*. That is why we were not permitted to cover the lower part of his nose in any way. We could have devised all kinds of safeguards against his using his normal vision, including the 'intelligent reader's' suggestion of an opaque bag. But we were not allowed to put the man's head in a bag, because had we done so, it would have prevented him from 'seeing' with his nose. 'That is all very well', continues the intelligent reader, 'but if you cannot cover up the man's nose, it rather looks as if he can see down the sides of it, however thoroughly his eyes are plugged or bandaged.' That is exactly what his critics assert, and it is, I am sure, the explanation of Kuda Bux's 'feat'. But Kuda Bux is quite unmoved by criticism. He argues—quite logically—that if all he claims is to do something under *his* conditions, it is not fair to ask him to do the same thing under *yours*. 'If it is a trick,' he says, 'show me the man who can exactly duplicate it!' An obvious way to test the 'X-ray eyes' of Kuda Bux would be to enclose the test book in a box, or not to open the book at all. But the man does not pretend to read books in boxes, because something opaque would then be between his nostrils and the book to be read. We suggested putting a sheet of cardboard between the book and his face. But he argued that that broke the first condition under which he could 'see'. Mr. Lambert suggested putting a small eye-shade over each eye, sealing them to the flesh with adhesive tape. That would have been an excellent test, but we did not happen to have the shades. Kuda Bux told me that he had been tested in a similar way in India, the experimenters using small brass cups. The reader must remember that we had the man for

only two hours and could not try out everything. Since his visit it has occurred to me that a good test would be to pour into his eye-sockets a warm semi-fluid, opaque, viscous mass which would neither set nor 'run', and which would strongly adhere to the skin over its entire surface. I am sure that Kuda Bux would consent to such a test.

Kuda Bux's assertion that he 'sees' by means of his nostrils may appear fantastic, and we are not obliged to accept this 'explanation'. But, curiously enough, Jules Romans, in his *Vision Extra-Rétinienne*, has formed a similar theory. I quietly sounded Kuda Bux as to whether he had ever heard of the book, and he said he had not. The work is fairly well known in France, but few people in this country appear to have read the English translation. Romans states that it is necessary to leave the nostrils free in order that his blindfolded or blinded subjects shall distinguish colours. He says that 'the nasal mucosa is sensitive to light and to different coloured regions of the spectrum. This function is sharply distinct from smell.' He continues: 'The part played by the nasal mucosa leads us to the following question: is the unknown organ of extra-retinal vision situated in one part of the body? localised in a single one or diffused through many?' Kuda Bux answers that, in his case, the 'unknown organ' is situated in his nose.

Kuda Bux is clever. His 'eyeless sight' performance is extremely interesting, entertaining and puzzling, but our council came to the conclusion that we had witnessed nothing abnormal. During our test Bux would not allow us to adopt measures that *absolutely precluded* his seeing down the side of his nostrils and, although we witnessed a clever performance, all we learnt that afternoon was how extremely difficult it is to blindfold a person, using ordinary methods.

'The Man with the X-ray Eyes' is a title that has been assumed by other 'eyeless-sight' performers besides Kuda Bux. Soon after the War, I was in Berlin in order to see the perfor-

mances of Erik Jan Hanussen, the vaudeville occultist. I was staying at the Hotel Central in the Friedrichstrasse. One evening, just after dinner, a messenger brought me a note from a man named Max Weiss, who was waiting at the office. Weiss claimed that he had 'X-ray eyes' and that he would like to demonstrate to me. I went to my bedroom and told the messenger to send the man up.

I found that Weiss, like Kuda Bux, was a professional conjurer; and, also like Bux, he claimed that his alleged extra-retinal vision was something apart from mere trickery. The 'apparatus' for demonstrating his 'eyeless sight' was simple in the extreme, merely an old, common cigar-box (which had once contained one hundred Hamburg cigars) which he brought with him. Weiss said that there was no need to blind-fold him as the objects used for the test were placed in the cigar-box in his absence, and he would then tell me the names of them when he returned. He stipulated that only one object at a time was to be put in the box, and, if I used money, the pieces were to be of German, Swiss, or Austrian origin. Also, only the box he brought with him was to be used in the tests, as a 'certain amount of his personality had been absorbed by the wood'. I tried to look impressed.

I sent Weiss out of the room and very carefully examined his 'apparatus'. Even a cigar-box is not necessarily as innocent as it looks. But a long and intimate acquaintance with faked apparatus and mechanical boxes of all kinds convinced me that the box was not prepared in any way. I examined it against the light for minute holes or cracks, but none was visible and the box was undoubtedly what it purported to be. I placed a bunch of keys in the box, closed the lid, placed the box on a writing table and called Weiss.

With little showmanship, Weiss walked to the table, picked up the box and, after a pause of about five seconds, informed me that it contained a bunch of keys. He did *not* rattle the box.

I asked him how many keys, and he said 'eight'. I told him he had 'seen' correctly, but that there were six keys only. I sent him out of the room again.

For the next test, I placed my fountain-pen in the box, and, without touching the latter, Weiss again guessed correctly. Then it dawned upon me that the man must have noticed the pen was missing from my pocket. I invariably carry two metal pencils and a fountain-pen in my left, top waistcoat pocket, and their ends are visible to the most casual observer. To test my theory that Weiss took advantage of my carelessness, I sent him out of the room again, removed a tube of tooth-paste from the wash basin, and put it in my pocket. Then I produced from my suit-case an Agfa three and a quarter inch by two and a quarter inch film-pack, which I placed in the box. I told Weiss he could come in. With barely a moment's hesitation, and without touching the box, he immediately said he could 'see' a tube of tooth-paste! I nearly burst out laughing when I opened the box and showed him the film-pack. He appeared surprised, and asked me to make another test.

For the next experiment I removed my safety-razor case from the dressing-table and put it in my suit-case. From my pocket I produced a small scribbling-block and placed it in the cigar-box. Weiss came in and I saw him glance round the room. Then, in his best professional manner, he said: 'I see a beautiful red leather razor-case, with metal corners, but it is not in the cigar-box: I see it in your suit-case!'

Of course we had a good laugh over the trap I had set him, and he admitted that his keen observational powers helped his alleged extra-retinal faculty. He did a number of other tests, and some of them were impressive. He said he did not know how he managed it, but that his performance was not based entirely on guesswork or trickery. I agreed. His success was due partly to his noticing what objects were missing from a person or place, and partly to an almost hyperæsthetic sense (through

long practice) in judging an object by its weight or its 'feel'. He had used the cigar-box so long that he knew the exact weight of it. Knowing also the exact weight and poise of many common objects, if one of these objects were placed in the box, he could make a shrewd guess as to what it was.

As a further test, I procured a bowl of fruit from the restaurant of the hotel, and, selecting an orange and an apple of almost identical weight and size, experimented with Weiss as to whether he could tell the difference between the fruit when inside the box. He tried nineteen times and never made a mistake, but he had to *roll* the contents of the box in order to tell whether it contained an orange or an apple: the latter rolled unevenly, but more smoothly, owing to its shiny surface. After noting the very slight difference in weight between my fountain-pen and a propelling pencil which I had with me, Weiss successfully indicated which was which fifteen times in succession, when either of the articles was placed in the cigar box in his absence.

I complimented Weiss on his clever performance and asked him what made him call upon me. He said he heard I was in Berlin and, wishing to see me, could think of no better way of introducing himself than his 'X-ray' trick. I suggested that the late Harry Houdini (*i.e.* Ehrich Weiss) was a member of his family, but he said that was not so.

I have tested many music-hall performers claiming abnormal powers, but I am still waiting to be convinced that a genuine psychic or supernormal phenomenon has ever been demonstrated upon the vaudeville stage. I have analysed the feats of stage 'mediums', clairvoyants, 'magnetic ladies', 'strength resisters', 'eyeless sight' exponents, etc., but I am sure that, in every case, the results were brought about by the normally operative motor and sensory apparatus of the body.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a list of works dealing with these feats of music-hall performers, see notes to Chapter XV.

## XX. *Pale Black Magic*

When Dean Swift ridiculed the alchemist, Robert Boyle, in his *Pious Meditation Upon a Broomstick*, a very few years had elapsed since Lord Chief Justice Hale had—in effect—publicly avowed his belief in broomsticks as a reasonable and usual means of locomotion employed by the witches that duty compelled him to hang. 'I believe in such creatures as witches,' he declared at the Suffolk Assizes, 'because the Scriptures had affirmed so much.'<sup>1</sup> This direction to the jury had the desired effect and he proceeded to sentence Amy Duny and Rose Cullender, who were duly hanged four days afterwards (on March 17, 1664). Specifically, they were executed for the crime of bewitching and conveying crooked pins, needles and twopenny nails into the bodies of two young children. The chief 'exhibit' in this case was a bag of nails which the prosecution alleged had been vomited by the children. Sir Thomas Browne, the eminent Norwich physician, was called as an expert witness, and he explained to the jury, by long and learned arguments, both theological and metaphysical, how the humours of the body could 'with the subtlety of the Devil' produce a physiological condition resulting in a flux of nails. That argument was enough to hang anyone.

From a seventeenth-century Suffolk court-house to a wartime Unter den Linden is a far cry. But twopenny nails have not altered much during three hundred years, and we now find German amateur occultists knocking them into selected portions of a wooden Hindenburg's anatomy instead of expelling

<sup>1</sup>See *A Tryal of Witches at the Assizes Held at Bury St. Edmonds for the County of Suffolk* (before Sir Matthew Hale), London, 1682.

them from their own oesophagus. They were driving the nails *for luck*—a propitiation to the God of War not without its humorous side.<sup>1</sup>

But these German patriots, in their enthusiastic attempt at a little mild witchcraft, had got the technique all wrong. The female village idiot who, *tempo* James II, buried the pin-studded waxen effigy of her enemy, knew that with every pin-thrust her victim would be injured in a corresponding vulnerable spot, eventually succumbing to this vicarious mode of torture. This charming diversion of the countryside is known as 'sympathetic magic' and is still extensively, though discreetly practised.

Though the last English trial of a witch (Jane Wenham) was held in 1712 (in Scotland in 1722), that, needless to say, was not the end of witchcraft. On the contrary, when all danger of conviction and punishment was gone, the local 'wise woman' came into her own as it were; she assumed an honoured position as befitted a member of a genteel profession and shared with the squire and the parson the adoration—if not fear—of the neighbourhood. She also made money at it. Was the pretty milkmaid pining through unrequited love? A blood-red potion or philtre was guaranteed to make Amaryllis happy and pull wool over the eyes of the recalcitrant Robin (who had probably imbibed it with his evening beer) for at least as long as it took the happy pair to reach the churchyard wicket after the vital ceremony had been performed. Were a farmer's cattle 'overlooked'? A certain potent herb burnt at the moment of the full moon would not only break the spell, but the trouble would be automatically shifted to the belongings of the original tormentor, who would suffer tenfold for not having acquired that *finesse* so necessary in this 'overlooking' business. In the morning he would probably find that all the milk had turned sour or his wife had eloped with the head cowman.

Mention of Amaryllis reminds me that I formerly possessed

<sup>1</sup>Each nail cost a small sum which was devoted to a War charity.



a collection of Sussex love-tokens, charms or amulets that bucolic lovers exchanged with each other in order that their affection might not come unstuck. So long as the token was not lost or defaced, love's young dream ran no risk of becoming a nightmare. But should this happen, well, the token had not been charmed sufficiently and Amaryllis merely acquired another lover—and another token. Some girls collected them. These metallic charms (usually engraved emblems superimposed upon a coin of the realm, often with a punning device) are of considerable topographical and genealogical interest. One made in my own village reads 'M.S.L. 1798' and shows a rough delineation of Pulborough Church, with the South Downs in the background.

A natural sequence to the bewitching business was the trade of selling antidotes. The supply was equal to the demand, and itinerant vendors all over the country made a comfortable living in pandering to the credulous.

Before me as I write is the handbill of James Hallett, the 'curer of all diseases' and, according to his halfpenny token, 'mathematician and astrologer'. Hallett professed to cure everything under the sun. His advertisement informs us that he had specifics for 'deafness and roaring', 'vapours in women', 'St. Anthony's fire', and a thousand other complaints. He guaranteed to cure 'by herbs only'. He specialised in de-cursing the victims of the local spellbinder: 'Nativities cast for the Cure of Witchcraft and other Diseases that are hard to be cured', proving that, as recently as the beginning of the nineteenth century, being bewitched was as common as having toothache. Hallett was a noted character in the Downland villages, but could always be seen at 'No. 8 Halfway-house', or at his 'New-House, Westgate, Chichester', several times a week.

In addition to the witch-doctors who had regular stands in the towns and villages, peripatetic vendors of love-philtres, prophecies, oracles, magical mirrors (in which, if one followed



Collection of eighteenth-century Sussex love-tokens, charms, or witch-scarers (reduced).

the somewhat disgusting instructions, one was supposed to get a sly peep into futurity), and rejuvenating elixirs abounded. The marvels claimed for the last-named would have turned Dr. Voronoff and his monkey glands green with envy. Another circular (*circa* 1800) which I possess advertises a concoction, 'Elixir Grandior, or Aurum Potabile of the Ancients, and Sovereign Restorative for Health and Long Life. Prepared by Jasper the Hermit, Rosicrucian Philosopher, Physician, and Botanist.' Were he living to-day, Jasper would be a publicity agent.

Very little change in the beliefs or practices of the credulous has occurred during the past hundred years. Human nature still hankers after the unknown, and if fortune-tellers and vendors of magical nostrums have sunk to the level of a vagrancy act, the demand is still met—especially in the more remote country districts where the inhabitants are supposed to be less sophisticated. The itinerant merchant who sells cattle medicines in the village market-place will, for a suitable consideration, supply an antidote for the 'evil eye', and (if the risk be not too great) is not above compounding a sure-fire prescription which he hands to his client with the guarantee that it will 'charm' his neighbour's cattle or his daughter as the case may be. Peddling gipsies still do a good trade in herbal abominations which, were they caught, would bring them within the criminal law. Fortunately, their filthy nostrums rarely have the effect hoped for by the unfortunate serving-wench who is driven by despair into the arms of these Romany charlatans.

There is many a little chandler's shop, 'chemist', or herbalist in the smaller country towns in whose musty back room a most amazing collection of charms, potions and 'cures for witchcraft' can still be found. I have lived in a village for twenty years and have heard of many cases. On market days the credulous of both sexes surreptitiously steal into these places and, in an apprehensive whisper, inquire into the possibilities of a cure

## Great News to the Afflicted !!!

**L**O all who are afflicted with Diseases, let them be ever so stubborn or long standing, or if given up by Physicians, or turned out of Hospitals incurable, shall, with the help of GOD, be radically Cured, by JAMES HALLETT, the original Curer of all Diseases.

Cancers, King's Evil, Scrofula and Scorbatic Eruptions, Sore Heads, Scald Heads, Deafness and Roaring Noise in the Head, Blindness and Bad Eyes, Defecates of the Head, Brains, and Nerves, Palsy, Apoplexy, Lethargy, Convulsions, Frenzy, Vertigo, inveterate Head Ache, deplorable Nervous Distempers Malancholy in men, and Vapours in Women, Bilious cases, Debility, Indigestion, Goughs and Coughs, Lowness of Spirits Loss of Appetite, all Impurity of the Blood, Relaxation, Rheumatic and other Gouts, Yellow, Red, and other Jaundice, Agues, Asthma, and all Diseases of the Lungs, Exulcerated Lungs & Livers, strengthens the Liver, the Memory made good, White Swelling in the Knee, St. Anthony's Fire, St. Vitor's Dance, Corns either hard or soft and a certain Disease, whether fresh or thirty years standing, Cured by Herbs only, Weus of all sizes, and all other diseases on tedious tormention, Cured by James Hallett, the original Curer of all diseases.

He may be seen at his New-House three doors from the Waggon and Lamb, West-Gate, Chichester, every Wednesday and Thursday morning until 10, and Saturday until 3 o'clock. To be seen at No. 8 Halfway-house, on Saturday evening, Sunday Monday and Tuesday, until 11 o'clock, Thursday evening and Friday, until 11 o'clock.

A Universal Ointment for the Chilblains and Chap Hands, that will Cure them in a few hours if not Broke, and an other Ointment that will soon cure them if Broke.

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Ladies and Gentleman waited on at their own Houses, on the shortest notice.

•• Nativities cast for the Cure of Witchcraft and other Diseases that are hard to

Reproduction of handbill of James Hallett, the Sussex charlatan. Note the reference to the cure of witchcraft. Chichester, 1795-97.

for all sorts of extraordinary ailments—mostly magical. The victim of the Devil's machinations departs with a few dried herbs, some complicated instructions, and is satisfied. Auto-suggestion does the rest and the herbalist makes another grateful client.

In some parts of Central Europe the chemists' shops in the more remote towns and villages resemble veritable museums of dried anatomical specimens, curious powders, rare herbs and gums, and strange-looking liquids composed of stuff that would



Reproduction of halfpenny bronze token of James Hallett, the Sussex charlatan.

not look well in print. I remember once examining the interior of a little shop in a village near Prague and the description of Romeo's apothecary was forced upon me:

In tatter'd weeds, with overwhelming brows  
 Culling of simples; meagre were his looks,  
 Sharp misery had worn him to the bones;  
 And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,  
 An alligator stuff'd, and other skins  
 Of ill-shaped fishes; and about his shelves  
 A beggarly account of empty boxes. . . .

I asked the proprietor what all his extraordinary remedies were for and he replied that they were for 'various ailments', and we left it at that. In a corner I noticed a large bunch of dried leaves of garlic, near which no self-respecting vampire would dare to venture. By the way, garlic when eaten does not have the same effect.

The belief in witchcraft is still rampant the world over, and I am continually getting reports of cases where half-demented old women have been put to death for causing dire calamities to their neighbours. The following cases, which have recently come under my notice, throw a curious light on the much-vaunted enlightenment of the masses.

A year or so ago, an East Prussian farmer named Frederik Riek complained to the magistrates at Marggrabowa of the extraordinary things he had to do at the command of a witch who undertook to bring him prosperity. He had to write in honey on a thin cake of bread the magic words 'Adonis dear, Adonis my own! Thou canst do all. Thou art friendly and thy goodness is eternal. Help me this once. Thou art the Lord!' Then he had to wash his hands and face in water on which the morning sun had never shone; to say a prayer to Adonis seven times, and tie a cake of bread round his neck. At the same time he had to lend the witch a carriage; he had to get the heart of a white toad and tie it with three feathers under the seat of a bicycle he had bought for a 'wizard' who was assisting the witch. He provided thirty yards of 'English cloth' to darken the room in which the witch called up spirits. After the *séance* was over Frederik found he had lost 1200 good *Reichmarks*, and that fact appears to have awakened his slumbering intelligence. The witch and wizard were taken to court and, failing to convince the magistrates that they could fly up the chimney on a broomstick, were sentenced to three months' and six months' imprisonment respectively.

As recently as June 26, 1930, a man was fined at Tipperary for assaulting a woman who had gone to the famous well at Cashel in order to be cured of an ailment. The woman arose before dawn, walked to the well, drank its waters and walked round the well three times while reciting the rosary. She was about to repeat the performance when the defendant caught hold of her, broke the beads and said, 'Now the spell is

broken!' He was fined four pounds ten shillings for his lack of faith.

Amongst other cases reported to me was the one of the young woman of Genoa who, in February 1928, lost her handbag in a motor-bus—and added to the gaiety of nations in consequence. An employé found the bag, which contained, amongst the mysterious articles usually found in such a receptacle, a small cardboard box containing a bleeding heart pierced with a number of pins. The man was horrified and, scenting a crime, hastily conveyed the handbag to the nearest police station. An address in the bag enabled the police to identify the owner, and she was promptly invited to explain why she travelled around with bleeding hearts stuck with pins. For a long time the girl refused to give any information, but at last she confessed that, having been abandoned by her lover, she had consulted a witch, who told her to get the heart of a lamb freshly killed, pierce it with pins, and bury it in a corner of the cemetery at Staglieno, together with the unfaithful swain's photograph: this would infallibly ensure his return. The girl was on her way to perform this rite when she lost her handbag.

Not all the cases of modern witchcraft are as amusing as those I have cited. A short time ago a poor old woman who lived near Prato (Florence) was shot dead within a few yards of her own house because the death of a neighbour, a young girl who had just died of some wasting disease, was laid at her door. She was murdered by the brother of the girl, and the act was endorsed by local public opinion, who branded the victim a noxious witch and a dabbler in the Black Art. Occasionally in Italy one sees a cradle containing a baby slung up high against the roof, and only lowered at feeding time. This elevated position is to stop the witches 'biting' the child.

Even as I write these lines, a man named Abel Tennegun, aged thirty-one, has just been acquitted of the murder of a 'wizard' by the Angers (Touraine) Assize Court. The wizard's

name was Jably, a man who performed all kinds of magical rites. During the trial it was stated that he 'treated sick cows by bringing to the cowshed a bullock's heart into which he inserted about four pounds of needles. The heart and the needles were placed in a saucepan, and on the stroke of midnight on a Friday, Jably buried the whole on the left-hand side of the entrance to the shed. The sick cows recovered. Jably was so feared by the countryside that, in desperation, Tenneguin shot him dead in bed. The jury approved the murderer's action by acquitting him without hesitation.'<sup>1</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of persons in Great Britain admit that witchcraft is still to be counted amongst the possibilities, and something in the way of a magical curiosity was presented to me some years ago by a sailor who had just returned from a fishing expedition in one of the old sailing vessels. His home was in the Isle of Man, and just before he started on the voyage a local 'wise woman' had sold him a length of cord with three knots in it. Should the ship become becalmed, the untying of the first knot would raise a gentle breeze. If this did not suffice, the second knot was untied and half a gale was the result. The man was warned *on no account* to loosen the third knot, as a terrific hurricane would destroy his ship. The reader will note the subtle play on the man's fear concerning the third knot, thus going a long way towards compelling him to believe in the efficacy of the first two—and inducing him to buy the cord. He never had occasion to test this particular 'rope trick', and was about to join a steamship.

Many of the Welsh are particularly superstitious and thoroughly believe in witchcraft. A lecturer at the Folk Lore Society's Congress, held in London in 1928, gave some striking examples of their credulity. He quoted the case of a medical man who, when visiting a patient, found a moleskin tied round his neck. The man was wearing it in order to 'cure the asthma'

<sup>1</sup>*Daily Mail*, July 25, 1935.



—which it did. The doctor induced his patient to discard the skin, and the asthma immediately returned. Such is the power of mind over matter!

The Welsh witch-doctors sometimes sold their clients 'letters of protection'. One in the possession of the lecturer read: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. And in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, my Redeemer. I will give thee protection and will give relief to thy creatures, thy cows, thy calves, thy horses, thy sheep, thy pigs, and all creatures that live in thy possession from all witchcraft and other assailants of Satan. Amen.'

Witchcraft in some countries is officially admitted. To control the abuses of witchcraft the Government of Kenya drafted a Bill in 1925 which is known as the 'Witchcraft Ordinance, 1925'. The Bill provides for the punishment of 'any person who holds himself out as a witch-doctor able to cause fear, annoyance, or injury to another in mind, person, or property, or who pretends to exercise any supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery, or enchantment'. Even the possession of charms is punishable with a sentence of a year's imprisonment or a fifty pounds fine. This 'Witchcraft Ordinance' has merely driven the practice underground—nothing can eradicate it.

Sometimes witchcraft becomes a real nuisance and one cannot but feel sorry for the New York Onondaga Indian who, in the early winter after a fall of snow, has to frighten the witches away from his corn-pounder—or suffer the consequences. The witch-scarer wears a horribly gruesome mask, fastens a woman's skirt round his knees, makes a terrific din on a rattle fashioned out of a huge snapping turtle, and with his pestle in his hand defies the witches. He ends the ceremony by throwing his pestle at the pounder, and all is well.

Of my own experiences of witchcraft I will say a few words. One day I was motoring through a Devonshire lane and stopped my car by the side of a coppice where I noticed some

daffodils growing. In the centre of the coppice I saw the kneeling figure of an old woman who was chanting some verses. At my approach she hobbled off. Upon investigation I found that the moss upon which she had been kneeling had been disturbed, and kicking the soil with my heel I unearthed a large cork into which matches had been stuck to represent arms and legs, four black pins forming a sort of face. As I was examining this curious evidence of sympathetic magic I found that the old hag had stopped and was hurling imprecations at me, her 'curses loud and deep' contrasting strangely with the rest of the *mise-en-scène*. Did they have any effect upon me? They did: I had a beastly puncture on my way home!

The second case I will allude to was a much more sinister affair. I happened to be staying in Paris and was invited by a friend to hear an address on black magic by a young Indian. I learned that after the lecture there was to be a sort of a dignified 'Black Mass', and in my capacity of Foreign Research Officer to the American Society for Psychical Research I sent in a request to be present. My application was refused, but my friend was permitted to take a guest; so I went after all, but unofficially.

The house we went to was situated in the fashionable Étoile district in a road which connects the Avenue de Wagram with the Avenue MacMahon, and quite near the Arc. We were ushered through a court, up some stairs *au deuxième étage*, where a strange sight met our eyes; a sight, I may add, quite unlike the Witches' Sabbath of mediæval literature.

There were about twenty persons in the room, the walls of which were covered with alternating strips of black and yellow cloth, the whole illuminated by means of a moon-coloured lamp. At the far end was a simple altar, behind which stood the young Indian with a white man, both dressed in what looked like bath robes. In the front of the altar, with his back to us, stood a perfectly black negro boy, quite nude, holding a

smoking chafing dish. On the altar was burning some sort of resinous substance, the dense and acrid smoke from which filled the apartment. About every five minutes the two 'magicians' would chant some sort of incantation and immediately there appeared in the smoke from the altar tiny black figures which danced about in a life-like manner.

That is all that happened and, to be candid, I was rather bored with the proceedings. The little black figures intrigued me, but as I could not investigate, to this day I am not decided whether the figures were produced by trickery (a secreted ciné projector, with a suitable film, focused on the smoke, would produce this illusion) or genuine black magic—probably the former. But certainly there was nothing of the hideous obscenities of the genuine Black Mass so minutely described in the *Chambre Ardente* during the examination of La Voisin and her co-Satanists (among whom was Madame de Montespan) of the Rue Beauregard.<sup>1</sup> I strongly suspect that the whole affair was staged in order to advertise the lectures I have mentioned.

To assert that the practice of witchcraft is dead is ridiculous. Every day I receive evidence of the existence of the cult. But not all witches wear conical hats and ride on broomsticks. Sometimes they rent expensive flats, affect a discriminating taste in French *lingerie*, and keep two cars. These 'witches' are the fashionable fortune-tellers who inhabit the purlieus of Bond Street.

Among the peasants of certain parts of Germany—especially the Harz district—witchcraft is still accepted as a fact. In the spring of 1932 I did my best to enlighten the natives by introducing into the *Goethejahr* celebrations a magical experiment known as the 'Blokberg Tryst'.

In the autumn of 1931 I acquired a manuscript which is an early nineteenth-century transcript of a page of the so-called

<sup>1</sup>See *La Sorcellerie et la science des poisons au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, by A. Masson, Paris, 1904.

'High German Black Book'—a hand-written volume of magical formulæ which is preserved in one of the German museums. The 'Black Book' dates from about the fifteenth century, and contains much ritual for the practice of transcendental magic; and amongst the experiments is one called the Bloksberg Tryst. Bloksberg is the old name for the Brocken, highest of the Harz Mountains. The MS. I acquired is a copy of the Brocken experiment.

In 1932 was celebrated throughout Germany the centenary of the immortal poet Goethe. The Harz Goethe Centenary Committee (the *Harzer Verkehrsverband*), hearing that I possessed a copy of the ritual of the Bloksberg Tryst, invited me to reproduce the experiment as part of the *Goethejahr* celebrations. I consented. Another reason why I decided to go—quite unofficially—was that I wished to emphasise the absolute futility of ancient magical ritual under twentieth-century conditions.

Goethe made an intensive study of magic and witchcraft, and his classical scene of the *Walpurgismacht* in *Faust* has done much to immortalise his 'divine comedy'. That Goethe studied the original of the Bloksberg Tryst is almost certain, as several correspondences between the old MS. and the *Walpurgismacht* are apparent.

The MS. is written in an early nineteenth-century hand in faded brown ink, almost illegible in places. In the centre of the MS. is the magic circle painted in two colours (red and blue) with the usual symbols. On the reverse of the MS. is an engraving (undated) of the town of Bacharach, on the Rhine, by the German artist, R. Püttner. The verbatim translation of the original 'Tryst' is as follows, with my annotations in square brackets:

#### *The Bloksberg Tryst*

This is a true faire and perfect means of excelling over Nature and has been truefully proved in the presence of the writer

after many trials during his travels in the Low Countries. Exact conditions will prove that all things are possible to the God of Nature if all instructions are obediently obeyed with a good heart. What is related here I have seen with mine own eyes—*Vita si scias uti longa est* [Life is long if we know how to use it]. On the foremost peak of the Bloksberg [Brocken, one of the Harz Mountains, 3733 feet high] the test must be made with a pure heart and mind and selfless intention [intention]. The time between one day before to one day after the Moons fullness is necessary but best in the Winter season. He that seeks the Almighty power must place himself on the foremost Peak of the Bloksberg at the time appointed. His servants must be a maiden pure in heart in fair white garments and a virgin He Goat. Let thy mouth and heart be free from foulness. Let the student test my words by the light of a Pine fire which is necessary. Neer the Granit Altar let the Student set the following Magic Symbols which must be sette out in white of a bigness suitable for his test. [Here comes the magic circle.] The apex of the Triangle must direct to the Tower of Kassel the base will then cover the Hexentanzplatz [a village in the Eastern Harz Mountains; a rocky plateau, 1480 feet high] so named of the witches who dwell there. Haveing set his symbols demanded by ye Black Booke as prescribeth above in all their correctness he taketh his servants into the inner House of the Triangle within the Circle of Power. The Goat he putteth before him the Maiden taketh her place by the side of the Goat which she leadeth on a white silken cord. He then lighteth a bowle of faire incense which burneth for 15 minutes the Student repeating the following in all lowliness *Mutare et insignem attenuat deus obscura promens* [Should be: *Valet ima summis Mutare, et insignem attenuat deus, obscura promens* (Horace), i.e. God hath the power to change the lowliest with the loftiest, and He maketh the great men weak, bringing to light things hidden in gloom]. At the end of the appointed time the Maiden anointeth the Goat say-

ing *Terra es terram ibis* [Dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return]. Ye Goat is then to be turned round three times against ye sunne and ye incence rekindled. The Student then handeth the Mayden a vessel of fair red wine saying *Si Deus nobiscum quis contra nos* [If God be with us, who shall be against us?]. The pine fire is then dampeth by ye servant of the Student outside ye Circle of Power and the incence is dampeth by ye Student. All should now be of a blackness except for ye light of ye moone. The Mayden now taketh ye vessel of wine and poureth it slowly over ye head of the Goat at the same time repeating *Procul O procul este profani* [Begone, begone, ye profane ones]. At the ending of the words a blackness obscureth the moone and a pin light cometh from the Tower of Kassel. At this moment the Mayden quickly covereth and completely hideth the He Goat with a faire white cloth when an apparation [apparition] is seeneth within the Triangle. Instanter the cloth is removeth by the Mayden and a faire youth of surpassing beauty is scene in the stead of ye Goat. Thus have I witnesseth myself. From ye High German Blacke Booke. The ungent [unguent, for anointing the goat] is prepared from ye blood of bats caught before ye midnight hour scrapings from a church bell to be mixed with soot and bees honey into a fair ointment. Not for melancholic persons.

\* \* \* \* \*

The magic of the Bloksberg Tryst is not nearly so black as it has been painted—in fact, it is *white* magic, because no *diablerie* enters into it. The ritual itself is familiar to students of mediæval necromancy, and the components we recognise as old friends: a magic circle with the usual symbols, a triangle, a pine fire, a bowl of incense, a 'pure virgin', a 'he-goat', Latin incantations, and a noisome ungent made of bats' blood, scrapings from church bells (obtained for me by a friendly bell-ringer from the belfry of a Sussex church), soot and honey. All these essentials

can be found in a hundred magical formulæ. No one can deny that the ancient sorcerers loved the picturesque.

Where the Bloksberg Tryst differs from similar experiments is that it can be effective only at a certain spot (on the Brocken 'neer the Granit Altar') and only during a full moon. And the apex of the triangle has to point to the Tower of Kassel and its base to the Hexentanzplatz—a famous plateau opposite the Brocken where tradition has placed the scene of the witches' orgies. So we journeyed to the Brocken as the guests of the *Harzer Verkehrsverband*, determined to carry out the experiment with scientific exactitude in order to forestall any criticism by the remaining devotees of the Black Art. I was accompanied by Mr. C. E. M. Joad, whose interest in magic and psychic matters is well known.

We arrived on the Brocken on Friday evening, June 17, 1932, and found everything in readiness except the moon. A 'magic circle' accurately designed in mosaic had been laid down 'neer the Granit Altar', and a white kid, specially chosen at birth, was trotted out for our inspection. The 'maiden pure in heart', in the person of Miss Urta Bohn, daughter of Dr. Erich Bohn, of Breslau, was awaiting us, and her spotless white dress did not seem out of place at a magical experiment.

What did seem out of place at such a test were the forty-two photographers, seventy-three Pressmen and a 'talkie' set-up. These professional gentlemen comprised almost our entire audience at the first trial, which was merely a rehearsal. To the clicking of cameras, and by the light of magnesium flares, the rehearsal proceeded more or less smoothly. We found that our pine fire was too fierce and it was impossible to extinguish it in the time prescribed by the ritual. The 'maiden' was not word-perfect as regards the Latin incantations—and imprecations—and some minor details of the experiment were inaccurately staged. But all these defects were remedied the next evening. We finally arrived at the stage where the maiden had to cover



Harry Price (extreme right) and C. I. M. Joad (next to him) in the Magic Circle on the Brocken. Next to Joad is Franklin Urra Bohm, who took the part of the 'maiden pure in heart' in the *Goethejahr* experiment.





the goat with a 'faire white cloth', the metamorphosing effect of which was to convert the goat into a 'youth of surpassing beauty'. The Press reports of this rehearsal rather stressed the point that the 'goat remained a goat', as if the reporters really anticipated the appearance of the magical Adonis!

The real experiment was on Saturday, June 18, 1932, and fortunately the Pressmen and photographers had departed to their respective offices and dark-rooms, and we were left in peace. But the moon again deserted us. A few silvery gleams between the clouds earlier in the evening raised our hopes, but by midnight the mountain top was enveloped in mist and the first essential—according to the ritual—to the success of the experiment was absent. I had to point this out to the large crowd which had assembled on the Brocken. I emphasised the fact that as the moon was absent it was rather absurd to make the experiment. But I was persuaded to proceed with the test as so many persons had come to do homage to Goethe and his associations with the Brocken, and did not want to be disappointed. Still hoping that the moon would appear at the psychological moment, we proceeded with the Tryst, and this time everything went well, and there was no hitch. The spectators were intensely interested, and you could have heard the proverbial pin fall during the performance of the ritual. Again quoting the morning newspapers, 'the goat remained a goat'.

It is a reflection on the popular Press of this country that the chief items of the programme arranged for this unique evening have never been reported at all. Though our magical experiment was a fitting finale to the Goethe night arranged by the Harz administration, it was not the most important item. And I am sure that the majority of the great crowd which assembled in and around the Brocken hotel was present in order to enjoy the Goethe feast provided by the local authorities. A programme—as wonderful as it was interesting—was arranged as a suitable setting for our experiment.

The programme began at eight o'clock on Saturday, June 18, 1932, with a large dinner party, during which Professor Dr. C. A. Pfeffer, the distinguished Goethe authority, introduced the English visitors in their native language. Mr. C. E. M. Joad, Dr. A. von Mohr of Göttingen, and the present writer replied. Mr. Joad's address dealt principally with magic, witchcraft and the *raison d'être* of our visit. After the introductory speeches a band of players under Rudolf Hartig, director of the Wernigerode theatre, staged the *Hexenküche* scene from *Faust*, a well-acted representation of the famous witches' kitchen.

Then Professor Pfeffer delivered a brilliant address, *Bedeutung von Goethes I. Harzreise für ihn und uns*, which elicited tremendous applause, and which I hope will be published.

Then came what I considered the *pièce de résistance* of the evening—the classical *Walpurgisnacht* scene from *Faust* performed by Herr Hartig and his players amidst the granite rocks of the Brocken, on the site which inspired Goethe to write the Brocken scene for his immortal poem. The lighting effects were a joy to behold, and the scene was weird in the extreme. Mephistopheles, Faust, Irrlicht, the Witches, Lilith, Gretchen, General, Minister, Parvenu, Author, Will-o'-the-Wisp, Procktophantasmie—all were there, and the magical lighting effects, softened by the evening mist, were truly wonderful. This was indeed real magic—the magic of the theatre. Afterwards came other scenes from *Faust*, the whole interspersed with Harz folk music by the peasants and miners in their ancient dress. It was well worth journeying to the Bloksberg to participate in such a *Goethenacht*.

Although our principal object in staging the Bloksberg Tryst was to ridicule the idea that magic ritual, under modern conditions, is still potent, we are not so foolish as to imagine that we have entirely succeeded: superstition is not so easily killed as all that! But the experiment was worth reproducing, as the investigation of such things is perfectly legitimate when

carried out in a scientific manner; and I consider that the result of our test has advanced us a stage in our knowledge of ancient magic ritual.

The scoffer will tell us that because we had no faith, the experiment was not conclusive; in other words, that the formula will not work automatically. That is all very well, but what sort of a state do we have to induce in order that the magical metamorphosis shall take place? The fifteenth-century scribe who compiled the Black Book says of the Brocken miracle: "Thus have I witnesseth myself." But in my opinion the old man had worked himself into such a condition of ecstatic enthusiasm that he was really in a state of auto-hypnosis or self-induced trance, and when he 'saw' the goat change into the 'faire youth' it was merely an hallucination. I think he wrote out the formula in good faith. Quite a different type of scoffer will tell you that belief in witchcraft and black magic no longer exists. This assertion is merely ridiculous. A short time ago a number of South German labourers were imprisoned for nearly killing a 'witch' alleged to have overlooked their cattle. In the Harz district—the last stronghold of paganism in Germany—the belief in witchcraft is still rife, as I discovered for myself during my visit.

The trip to the Brocken was not without its amusing incidents. I have already remarked that paganism died hard in the Harz country, and I was told there were still witches to be found amongst the mountains if one searched long enough.

We had made Göttingen our headquarters for the preparation of the Brocken experiment, and during a reconnoitre in the Harz country we heard that there was a 'real live witch' to be found in or near Wernigerode. Our informant was a German lady, and she told us that if we journeyed to Wernigerode she would undertake to get the witch there by hook or by crook.

Joad and I were elated at the thought of meeting a modern disciple of his Satanic majesty, and I had visions of sampling her

'brew', and perhaps filming her having a ride on her broomstick, as I had taken a cinematograph camera with me.

At very considerable trouble and with several hours' motor-ing we duly arrived at Wernigerode for the appointment—or rather disappointment, as we discovered that the *Zauberin* was a buxom young actress *who had once played the part of a stage witch!* Of course, we all had a good laugh and that was the end of our witch hunt.

But we heard some good news in Wernigerode. The lady who found us the 'witch' informed us that Halberstadt (where she resided) was much interested in our magical experiment and that our fame in that place was so great that it had been decided to confer on Joad and me the 'freedom of the city'. Would we accept the honour? Of course we said we would, and it was arranged that on the following afternoon we should motor to Halberstadt for the ceremony.

The question as to how we should dress for the 'presentation' did not worry us much as our wardrobe was extremely limited. Eventually Joad decided to put on his white drill suit which had created a sensation in Göttingen. I tossed up to see whether I would wear my dinner jacket and opera hat or a lounge suit. The latter won.

We speculated as to how the 'freedom' would be 'conferred' and I thought what a nuisance it would be to have to carry a golden casket around with us: the illuminated address we could post home.

We arrived on the outskirts of Halberstadt in good time, and slowed down our car in order to make an impressive entry. The streets were quite deserted and I thought it curious that the town band did not turn out to meet us. However, we reached Frau X's house as arranged and, after some refreshment, we set off to be introduced to the *Bürgermeister*. We found his representative in his shirt-sleeves, at his stationer's shop, doing a brisk trade. Introductions over, we all adjourned to the beauti-

ful *Rathaus*, where we were introduced to the mayor, who showed us his parlour and pictures of departed *Bürgermeister*, and welcomed us formally and officially. We then signed our names in the Visitors' Book. The ladies of the party were excluded from this part of the ceremony.

After about fifteen minutes' conversation about nothing in particular, the mayor saluted us and a clerk bowed us out. We had received the 'freedom' of Halberstadt! We forgot to inquire what the privileges were, but we were impressed with the simplicity of everyone concerned—especially ourselves!

The Brocken experiment was the means of establishing a newspaper, the *Brocken-Post*, the first number of which contained an account of our experiment. Speaking of newspapers, the Press of the world fully reported the experiment. A few journals, in order that they could make fun of the whole affair, pretended that we went to the Brocken with the firm conviction that the goat *would* change into the 'faire youth'. But most of the papers realised that the trial of such experiments is worth while, the *Evening Standard* remarking (June 18, 1932) that the 'investigation of them is a step forward in the progress of science. . . . The true scientist inquires into the meaning of all phenomena without prejudice.'

## XXI. *'I Have Seen the Indian Rope Trick'*

I have seen the Indian Rope Trick. At least, I have seen a clever representation of that great illusion which has intrigued newspaper correspondents for so many years. The performer of the Trick was Karachi, assisted by his diminutive son Kyder, aged eleven.

Before I proceed further, I had better describe the Rope Trick of tradition. There are many versions, but the story which makes its perennial appearance in the Press is more or less as follows: a fakir, dressed in flowing garments, and accompanied by one or more assistants, selects a site for the Trick and proceeds to collect a crowd, which he carefully places. The performer takes a long rope, uncoils it, swings it round his head and lets the free end soar skywards—where it remains. With words which sound like imprecations, he commands a frightened-looking youngster to climb the rope. The boy obeys and disappears into the clouds. With a knife between his teeth the fakir follows the boy, disappears, and a few moments later, to the accompaniment of ear-piercing screams, the horrified spectators see pieces of boy, mutilated and gory, tumbling out of the blue. When the shock of the 'tragedy' is at its height, they are amazed to see the fakir re-coiling his rope, at the same time as the 'victim' is found at the back of the crowd, begging for baksheesh. That is the traditional Rope Trick, stripped of its trimmings.

Has the Rope Trick ever been witnessed in its traditional form? I do not think it has. I have carefully analysed all the accounts of the Trick which have come under my notice, and in each case there was a flaw, such as a faulty memory, in-

correct sequence of events, mal-observation, ignorance of deceptive methods—or sheer lying. There was always *something* that would not stand up against cold analysis. Certainly, there have been rope tricks in the form of conjuring illusions or stage turns, and I will deal with these later. Also, there have been seen boys balanced on tops of bamboo rods, which travellers termed the Rope Trick. But that was because they could not tell a bamboo from a rope. The mass-hypnosis 'solution' is merely a legend: science will not admit that a number of persons can be hypnotised simultaneously under the conditions imposed by an itinerant showman.

On April 30, 1934, one of the magical societies convened a meeting at the Oxford House Theatre, Marylebone, in order to kill the Rope Trick stone dead and give it a decent funeral. The Trick was rather knocked about, but it survived, as the subsequent correspondence in *The Listener* proved. I was invited to the obsequies and on the platform with me were the late Lord Amphill, a former Viceroy of India, and several other distinguished persons who had lived in the East, and who had gone out of their way to see the Trick. But not only did they *not* see it, but they could find no responsible person who had. They received accounts from travellers who had mistaken the bamboo trick for the genuine article, which rather reminds one of the old lady who, after a tour of India, remarked that the most inspiring spectacle she had seen was 'the sun setting behind the Aga Khan'. I reiterate that there is no scientific evidence for the Rope Trick in its traditional form, and the Oxford House meeting confirmed this view.

The outcome of the Oxford House 'funeral' was a verbal war which, for several months, entertained readers of *The Listener*.<sup>1</sup> One of the protagonists wrote to the editor and said that he had *seen* the Rope Trick on the sands at Plymouth. Not only had the Trick been performed, but it had been photographed—and

<sup>1</sup>See *The Listener* from the end of May 1934 until April 1935.



he enclosed the pictures themselves to prove it. The photographs were reproduced<sup>1</sup> and they looked impressive.

There was nothing ambiguous about them. There was the rope, straight up in the air, apparently defying gravity, with Karachi squatting at the base and Kyder, like a monkey, clinging to the top of it, several feet above the ground (see Plate XII).

It can be imagined that *The Listener* pictures fell like a bomb-shell among the conjurers—especially those who were so certain that the Rope Trick could not be done, *by any means*. There were cries of 'Fake!' Of course: the Rope Trick *must* be a rope fake. As a correspondent in *The Listener* pointed out, 'What is a trick, if it is not a fake? Is a trick less of a fake for being "genuine", or is a "genuine trick" a trick that is not a trick?' In the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (3rd edition, 1934) the meaning of the word 'trick' is as follows: 'Fraudulent device or stratagem; feat of skill or dexterity, knack, precise mode of doing or dealing with a thing', etc. In other words, the Rope Trick *is a trick*.

But the conjurers would not have it. They admitted that nearly all tricks are tricks, but that the Rope Trick is something else. They said—in effect—'It is a supernormal trick'! That is, a trick that cannot possibly be done. So they offered any person five hundred guineas if he could do it.

I became interested in Karachi and his particular Rope Trick, and, through the kindness of Mr. R. S. Lambert, arrangements were made for the performance of the trick in London. Owing to mechanical and spatial difficulties, the Rope Trick, as an illusion, has never been popular as a vaudeville act, and Karachi is to be congratulated upon not only doing the Trick in the open air, but upon performing it before a body of sceptics who made no secret of the fact that they were present to discover the *modus operandi*. Karachi (his real name is

<sup>1</sup>See *The Listener* for Dec. 5, 1934.

Arthur Claud Darby, and he is English) was invited to London, and I will now give the story of his somewhat protracted visit. After some correspondence, it was arranged that Karachi should be in London on the morning of December 31, 1934, prepared to do the Trick. He duly arrived at our rooms, complete with Kyder and full Eastern regalia. But, like a bolt from the blue, he informed me that he was *not* going to do the Trick, and that at least four days' preparation of the site was necessary. Also, he had to scour London to find a 'certain rare mineral' which had to be planted in the ground where the Trick was to take place. I informed Karachi that I had selected Mr. C. E. M. Joad's Hampstead garden for the demonstration, and that I was sure Joad would not mind how many rare minerals were planted on his property. I also told Karachi that a distinguished audience was awaiting us at Hampstead, and that he had better make his apologies to *them*.

At Hampstead we were met by the editor of *The Listener* and his friends, and I had to break the news to them. They were not only surprised and disappointed, but somewhat hurt at Karachi's not warning them that he required four days in which to prepare the Trick. As some compensation for our trouble and loss of time, Karachi consented to don his Eastern robes and do a few rope-balancing feats, which were quite good. Feeling rather less disgruntled, we took Karachi out to lunch and asked him point-blank what he came to London for. His reply was to the effect that, given time, he was quite willing to do the Trick. He specified one of those wide, open spaces where he could work on the site without being overlooked. We agreed to all his conditions and found him a large field at Wheathampstead, a village a few miles north of Hatfield. He agreed to perform the Trick on the following Monday, January 7, 1935.

I have already described the traditional Rope Trick, which is usually accompanied by a traditional *mise-en-scène*: blinding

sun, cerulean skies, scorching sands, a—very convenient—hazy horizon, with attendant palm trees and Sons of the Desert. The field at Wheathampstead was not a bit like this: it was a cross between a quagmire and a brickfield. But to compensate for these shortcomings, it was next door to a comfortable inn, 'The Nelson', which was the agreed rendezvous.

We arrived in a cold drizzle, which turned to snow, accompanied by a bitter nor'-easter. We found Karachi and his son in the bar parlour, all blacked up and wearing the robes of their profession: voluminous garments of red and yellow, with sky-blue turbans. Kyder had bare feet. In another room of the inn we discovered the remainder of our party, which included the following: Mr. R. S. Lambert; Mrs. Mary Adams, of the Talks Department, B.B.C.; Mr. J. W. Brown, the owner of the field; Professor C. Daryll Forde, the anthropologist, of University College, Aberystwyth; Mr. W. E. Williams, Secretary of the British Institute of Adult Education; Miss Ethel Beenham, Secretary of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation; Mr. Alex. L. Dribbell, a student of the occult, and myself.

Having fortified ourselves within against the elements raging without, we made our way to the field. Karachi had planted his rug on a slight eminence—an ideal pitch for the 'talkie' set-up which had been arranged by Gaumont-British Films. Before the Trick, Karachi did some clever sleight of hand work with a pack of cards which, after three minutes, were sodden with snow. He then very cleverly balanced a six-foot rope horizontally on his hand and vertically on his chin. Then I spoke a few words into the microphone by way of introduction, and Karachi commenced his great Trick, which I cinematographed.

Squatting on his rug like a real fakir, with Kyder by his side, he threw us a thick rope about six feet long. We examined this, and passed it back. It was not prepared in any way. Taking the



PHOTO LEWIS HAYMOUTH

Karachi and his son, Kvdar, performing the Indian Rope Trick.



rope under a star-spangled velvet cloth which he used as a screen, an end immediately reappeared, pushed up from below with a jerky movement. It was quite rigid, and rose to a height of about five feet; it was then withdrawn. Another rope, about eight feet long and two inches in diameter, was then passed to us. It was unprepared, but very loosely woven. In the same way he placed the second rope beneath his cloth, and again an end appeared and crept upwards with a jerky motion. It was noticed that the rope was now *tightly* woven and very rigid. When about eight feet of the rope had been paid out, Karachi commanded his son to climb up it—which he did with considerable agility. We had seen the great Rope Trick!

Arrived back in the more congenial atmosphere of the bar parlour, Karachi was about to tell me exactly how it was done. But I stopped him. No one needed telling how the Trick was done. It was obvious to every intelligent person within a radius of fifty yards that the showman had used a certain method of performing the illusion, and the effect was very good indeed. It would not be fair to give away his secret. His son, Kyder, did *not* disappear when he reached the top of the rope, but Karachi informed me (and explained the method) that even that classical ending of the Trick could be arranged. I congratulated him upon doing the Rope Trick so cleverly, and under such wretched conditions. I told him that, with a little more showmanship, he could make it even more convincing. In the hands of a Houdini, it would look like a miracle. But we did not grumble. We had seen the Rope Trick—and in a snowstorm!

My report on Karachi's achievement was duly published (with photographs) in *The Listener*,<sup>1</sup> and that started the ball rolling again. The conjurers said that the Rope Trick Karachi did was not *the* Rope Trick, but just *a* rope trick (without capitals). They said that the Rope Trick was not really a rope trick, it was a . . ., but I will not weary the reader with what

<sup>1</sup>See *The Listener* for Jan. 16, 1935.

they did say, because we have been through it all before. But they tenaciously clung to their five hundred guineas.

Another bombshell was in store for the conjurers: Karachi sent them a challenge, which was published in *The Listener*.<sup>1</sup> The terms were as follows: '(1) The conjurers to deposit the sum of two hundred guineas with a neutral party, who is to decide whether I have performed the Trick satisfactorily or not; (2) the rope is to rise up through my hands, while I am in a sitting posture, to a height of ten feet from the carpet on which I sit. It is to remain there erect while my son Kyder climbs up it, and remains with his hands at the top for at least thirty seconds while he can be photographed; (3) the rope shall be an ordinary thick rope with a good grip, which shall be supplied by any well-known rope manufacturer on a specification as to length and girth which shall be agreed between myself and the conjurers; (4) the place shall be any open place chosen by the neutral party, provided that its conditions are not dissimilar to those which obtain in India. This Trick ought to be performed as nearly as possible under natural Indian conditions. The neutral judge or judges should be satisfied that these conditions are fair to me. Furthermore, I am to be allowed access to this place for at least forty-eight hours previous to the performance, and during that access I must not be spied upon. This is in accord with what the Indians do, for they always perform the Trick on native ground, and never in the white man's private enclosure; (5) the rope shall be handed to me after examination at the commencement of the performance. The spectators shall be anywhere in front of my carpet at a distance of not less than fifteen yards.

'I will add that I am able to perform all my Rope Tricks on a table which can be examined beforehand. This disposes of the suggestion of bamboo, canes, telescopic rods, etc. Now, Sir, these are fair conditions, and if the conjurers are really seeking

<sup>1</sup>See *The Listener* for Jan. 30, 1935.

enlightenment they will accept my challenge, and this much-disputed tradition will become a reality.' The conjurers refused to accept Karachi's challenge.

The question now arises, has the Rope Trick ever been seen in the East, *in any form*? I am certain that it has. The evidence for its performance is much too strong for us to deny that the Trick itself is a complete myth. But I believe that what travellers have seen is just a conjuring illusion, very skilfully produced. I not only believe this, but I have first-hand evidence that such is the case. I make no apology for quoting this evidence *in extenso*, as I believe it solves the mystery of the classic Rope Trick.

A few years ago I came across an account, in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*,<sup>1</sup> of an account of the Rope Trick by the late Erik Jan Hanussen, the occultist. I knew Hanussen slightly (I had met him in Berlin) and I am certain that he wrote a true story of what he saw. The illusion was witnessed by Hanussen and his friends at a place called Hillah, an Arab village near the ruins of Babylon. I have made a translation of Hanussen's story, and here it is:

'The chief performer was Abu Nasser, an enormously tall Arab with a long white beard, dressed in a flowing garment (*Haik*) of dazzling white, and wearing white sandals. His assistants were two Arab men and a diminutive, thin Arab boy. They had brought with them an enormous basket and a carefully rolled up rope.

'We were placed in an exceedingly small roped-in enclosure and had to promise faithfully not to leave this on any account, as it would break the magic. I was at once struck by the fact that we were obliged to face the sun, and felt certain that this was not arranged by chance.

<sup>1</sup>'Das Fakirwunder des geheimnisvollen Seils', by 'Erik Jan Hanussen' (*i.e.* Hermann Steinschneider), in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, Berlin, Oct. 31, 1930.



'Abu Nasser and his assistants then threw themselves down and began incantations and prayers. This was kept up for fully over an hour. I immediately realised that this was solely done for the purpose of wearing us out, tightly squeezed together as we were in that small enclosure in the blazing sun, and thus prepare us for the illusion. Indeed, a few of the spectators felt ill.

"Then the actual performance started. As I had always suspected, the "rope" was not a rope in the real sense of the word. The extremely careful manner in which it was rolled up made it at once clear to me that it was a cleverly constructed apparatus, cut from the bones of sheep's (rams') vertebræ and skilfully covered with sailing cord. If one understands how to link the numerous pieces of these together by cleverly twisting the "rope", the at first flexible material is turned into a solid stick which, without anything else, just like a bamboo stick, can support the weight of a heavy man. Abu Nasser and his assistants took the rope, holding it at the ends and in the middle, and then, with a sudden jerk which was really marvellous, they threw it into the air, where it actually remained. The lower end, however, as I immediately noticed, stuck to a depth of at least one and a half metres in the desert sand. It is more than probable that it was also held below the ground by another helper, or even two, who were secretly concealed in a previously cleverly constructed pit. Moreover, the rope was, of course, held by the two assistants above ground. These two stood with their backs turned to us, their hands spread out in an imploring manner so as to create the impression that the rope was being kept in the air by some secret formula. In reality, however, the rope was fixed through the belts of the two men and thus held by their bodies. It was highly interesting to see how the illusion arose that the rope was reaching high up into the skies. The explanation is that our eyes, through the long staring into the glaring light of the sun, were inflamed, tired and dazzled. The

end of the rope ran out to a point, and, although the rope was really not so very long, it gave one the impression that it was of enormous length, reaching right into the clouds.

"The little boy, who was clad in a tight black knitted garment, was first to climb the rope. He did this with the agility of a monkey. Then Abu Nasser, a knife between his teeth, followed him. Suddenly—I could hardly trust my eyes—both had actually vanished. My friend and I looked at each other amazed, and might still be standing there struck, if a penetrating smell had not caused us to cough, when we also noticed that Abu Nasser and the boy had surrounded themselves with "clouds" by means of some "smoke"-producing preparation not known to us. This, together with the dazzling skies, the blinding sun in our eyes, and the hazy horizon, created the illusion of complete disappearance. The whole had barely lasted a few seconds, when we heard terrible screams from above and the terrified spectators saw pieces being thrown down into the basket. First a pair of arms, then the legs, then the trunk, and finally the head, all blood-stained.

"During this time I had snapped pictures with my "Ika" camera, which I had carefully concealed in my belt, and the enlargements I made later on proved that the "limbs" were only stuffed rags which had been stained with animal blood.

"The next moment, it was clear to me what really had happened above, for when Abu Nasser was again visible and, holding the blood-stained knife between his teeth, climbed down, I could see that the little boy was concealed under his master's *Haik*, where probably the imitation "limbs" had previously been hidden.

"When Abu Nasser was about half-way down the rope he jumped into the basket, stamping like mad on the pieces of the "murdered" boy. A few of the ladies present screamed. Then Abu Nasser stepped out of the basket and sat down murmuring prayers. With his hands he made imploring movements over

the basket and thus brought the poor child back to life. Sound and merry the young son of the desert jumped out of the basket, and went to collect his baksheesh (tip) as quickly as possible, whilst the minds of the spectators were still filled with horror and sympathy.

'The whole thing was now quite clear. When Abu Nasser jumped into the basket with the boy still hanging on to him under his *Haik*, the youngster, protected from view by the high walls of the basket, crawled out, hiding the "pieces" in the basket under his master's garments. This done, Abu Nasser stepped out of the basket, knelt down and prayed. During this time the "underground" helpers drew the "pieces" down into the sand (protected by Abu Nasser's garment) and by the time Abu Nasser rose, there was no trace of anything left. He could show the empty basket, and, furthermore, take off his garments (which he actually did) to prove that no contrivance of any kind was concealed therein.'

Though I commenced this chapter by stating that, in my opinion, the Rope Trick has never been seen in its *traditional* form,<sup>1</sup> I will conclude by saying that I am equally convinced that the Trick itself has been witnessed as a conjuring illusion, accounts of which have been distorted and exaggerated by credulous travellers who were completely ignorant of the deceptive methods employed by the itinerant Eastern magician.

<sup>1</sup>As this work goes to press, the author has been informed by General Sir Ivor Maxse, K.C.B., that he saw the Indian Rope Trick when a subaltern in India. It was performed in the traditional manner, and Sir Ivor thinks that the audience must have been hypnotised.

## XXII. *How I Brought the Fire-Walk to England*

One of the ambitions of my life was to witness the fire-walk as performed by native devotees. I have been in several countries where the ritual is occasionally practised, but always missed it—sometimes by a few hours only. The fire-walk is a ceremony or rite—often of a religious character—which has been performed in various parts of the world for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. The details of the ritual vary in different countries, but one feature of it is always the same—the walking of devotees or ecstasies barefoot over hot stones or smouldering embers, placed usually in a trench, short or long, broad or narrow, according to the district where the spectacle is staged. It is done in India by priests, fakirs and other ascetics; it is performed in Bulgaria,<sup>1</sup> China, Tahiti, Japan, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, South Africa, Trinidad, Mauritius and Honolulu. But it was never seen in Great Britain until I staged two experimental fire-walks for the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation on September 9 and 17, 1935, respectively. Kuda Bux, the Kashmiri Indian ('the man with the X-ray eyes') was the performer, and the feat created the greatest interest among scientists and the official observers of our University Council. Kuda Bux has done the fire-walk in India on several occasions, and is thus acquainted with the technique of the ceremony.

Is fire-walking based on trickery? Can anyone do it? Do the

<sup>1</sup>See *Bulgarische Festbräuche*, by M. D. Arnaoudoff, Leipzig, 1917, pp. 82 ff., for account of the fire-walkers (*Nastmarki*) of Vurgari, Bulgaria.

performers prepare their feet? Can they convey their alleged immunity from burns to other persons? Do the 'walkers' burn their feet? Do they prepare their feet with a paste made of alum, salt, soap, and soda, as has been alleged? Does one have to be in an ecstatic or exalted condition? Does one have to possess 'faith'? Do the wood ashes (in the ember walk) form an insulating layer on top of the fire and thus prevent burning? Does the performer use an anæsthetic on his feet? Is the callosity of the skin the secret of the immunity from burns? Does the fakir have to hurry along the trench, or can he stroll? Does the devotee have to fast or otherwise prepare himself—mentally or physically—for the ordeal? These and similar questions we hoped to elucidate at our tests—and we found answers to most of them. The fire-walk has always been a supreme mystery and of perennial interest to newspaper readers. Judging from the correspondence which *The Times* printed in 1934,<sup>1</sup> the interest in fire-walking is greater than ever. Some readers believed that natives who walk about without any foot covering acquire a toughening of the soles of the feet which explains the immunity from injury in fire-walking; others did not. We have proved that the skin does *not* have to be callous.

Before I describe the two rather exciting and intensely interesting fire-walks which I staged, I will give three typical examples of fire-walking in other places, *viz.* Umbilo, Durban and Singapore. It is very necessary that the reader should know something of fire-walking, in order that he may contrast the cold-blooded performances of Kuda Bux with the frenzied exhibitions witnessed in the Orient and elsewhere. The accounts have been selected from my large collection of works on exotic rites.

In Natal, in the early spring of every year, there is witnessed ceremonial fire-walking which is made the occasion of a holiday and festival. The following is an account of the perform-

<sup>1</sup>See *The Times*, London, for period between Feb. 14 and Mar. 3, 1934.

ance as witnessed by a reporter of the *Natal Advertiser*.<sup>1</sup> It was held at the Umbilo temple:

‘Thousands of people thronged the vicinity of the Umbilo Hindu temple yesterday afternoon to witness the strange religious ceremony, *Theemeethe* (or *Treemiri*), or fire-walking. Europeans jostled Indians in their endeavour to see the proceedings, which were even more weird than the ceremony which took place last month.

‘A representative of the *Natal Advertiser* attended at the special invitation of the Hindu priest, and after witnessing the fire-walking, examined the *soutris* carefully. Six tons of firewood were used in making the fire over which the worshippers walked, but they suffered no harm to their feet, although the embers were white hot.

‘Two medical men, Dr. Goldberg and Dr. Witkin, also examined the *soutris*, and the former said he could offer no physiological explanation of the normal condition of the Indians after their terrible ordeal.

‘The ceremony began in the morning when the temple was made ready for the fire-walking. The tons of firewood were piled in their fire pit, which measured some 14 feet by 10 feet. About 11 o’clock the fire was lit and burnt so fiercely that no one could approach within yards of it.

‘In the meantime the Hindus who were to undergo the ordeal had adjourned to the banks of the Umhlatazana River, where they prepared themselves with prayer and oblations for this supreme test of the Brahmanic faith. As in the case of the *Thai Poosam* ceremony, their mouths were bound to induce concentration of thought, and they took no notice of the chatting throng which milled continually round them.

‘Nine men and one woman participated, all of whom were elderly. The woman was aged 60 and had snow-white hair. She had previously undergone the fire test on 10 occa-

<sup>1</sup>For Mar. 5, 1928.

sions and was regarded with reverence by the devotees of her religion.

'As the morning wore on the crowd swarming about the grounds of the temple became denser, and a ring 10 rows deep formed round the fire pit, which had been roped off.

'Indian women in their brightly-coloured *sauris* continually made gifts to the effigies of the three Brahmanic divinities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and gradually the throng became worked up to a high pitch of religious fervour. At two o'clock Major Webb Richards (Commandant of Police in the Durban district) arrived. He was garlanded by the priest with marigolds and chrysanthemums and formally welcomed.

'In reply, Major Richards stated his pleasure at being present. On the eve of his departure on transfer from Durban, he thanked the Indian community for being so well-behaved during his term of office here.

'The three medical men, Dr. Smith, Dr. H. R. Goldberg and Dr. M. Witkin, who were present by invitation, were also garlanded. Hundreds of Europeans were present by this time, and in many cases they incurred the wrath of the Indians by pushing their way through the throng and entering the enclosure.

'The representative of the *Natal Advertiser* and the photographer were asked to remove their shoes in the enclosure, and thus they did. The close atmosphere became almost unbearable, for the fire had by this time become a heap of glowing embers, fanned occasionally by a slight breeze which filled the air with ashes. The sun blazed down directly on the close-packed throng, and to heighten the discomforture of the Europeans, tom-toms thundered close by without cessation.

'At 2.30 o'clock the weird sound of Indian reed pipes being played on the main South Coast road heralded the approach of the *soutris*. The fire was spread out with long rakes to an even thickness and a pool of water and milk was in readiness at one

end of the fire for the fire-walkers to cool their feet after

'The *soutris* arrived and walked round the pit. They were mostly in a state bordering on collapse, and all but the woman were skewered over their backs and arms with silver hooks, to which weights were attached. Several of them were supported by friends who walked beside them.

'Having circled the pit the *soutris* passed across the fire, their feet sinking in sickening fashion into the white charcoal. One by one they walked across, their faces showing no sign of pain, but their eyes were glassy as though they were in an hypnotic trance.

'One or two of them circled the pit again and crossed the fire a second time. Finally they were taken to the verandah of the temple, where the pins and hooks were removed from their flesh. Here Dr. Goldberg and Dr. Witkin examined their feet and found them free from blisters or marks. The medical men were unable to offer any explanation of the phenomena.

'The skin of the *soutris* which had been punctured in a thousand places did not bleed even when the hooks were withdrawn, and after a few minutes even the slight scars disappeared.

'The fire-walkers were also examined by Major Richards, who professed his astonishment at their normal condition after the ordeal. Throughout the ceremony the Hindu priest was eager to show the Pressman every stage of it, with the evident object of proving that there was no trickery. The feet of the fire-walkers were not prepared in any way for their ordeal, and no salve or ointment was applied from the time they emerged from the fire until the time that their feet were examined by the medical men.'

My second account<sup>1</sup> of fire-walking is a graphic story of the rite as seen at Durban. The technique differs from the Umbilo ceremony in many respects:

<sup>1</sup>See *The National Geographic Magazine*, Washington, D.C., for April 1931. Vol. LIX, No. 4, p. 452 (one illustration).



'But the most curious of Durban's sights is that of the Indian fire-walking. Imagine a roped-off space where men rake level the embers of a great log fire. Half-suffocated masses of vividly draped East Indians, keyed to religious tension. Jostling throngs of unreverential Europeans in circus mood. Standards hung with palm fronds, and a little shoulder-borne shrine with idols of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. And presently the foliage of near-by trees scorches and dies, while attendants dash water in the faces of fainting women and children.

'What are these entering ten, lunatics or epileptics? They are naked to the waist; they are skewered through the flesh as meats are skewered; their heads loll, their tongues slaver, their eyes protrude. These, the *soutris*, or fire-walkers, have fasted week-long and have just been sprinkled with water from holy Ganges.

'Tom-toms beat, cymbals clash. The gaudy shrine has been set at the farther end of the fire bed, whose gray ash glows furnace-like under the least wind puff. And now—you gasp—one of the *soutris* runs staggering across the fire to the altar of

'Another passes over, a woman, chanting; and now a third, a boy of eight years. Then come two who, colliding midway, fall prone on the fire bed, then arise and stagger onward to the shrine. And now all have passed over, and tom-toms and cymbals vibrate anew through the awed hush of India's massed ranks.

'What of the physical phenomenon? Indisputably the foot soles of two of the *soutris*, as they lay in collapse after the ceremony, showed ash dust, but no burns. And what of the mental phenomenon? Indian mystics will tell you that by self-inflicted tortures the soul reaches through flesh-numbing ecstasy towards those higher states of being that lie between it and the Absolute.'

My third illustration of *Treemiri* (fire-walking) comes from

Singapore, and is from an account by L. Elizabeth Lewis.<sup>1</sup> Again, the performers are Hindus:

'The devotees, including quite a number of women, approximated 400. Some were kneeling and touching the earth with their foreheads, while others, more devout, were literally groveling in the dirt. A few were endeavouring to crawl or roll completely around the temple, a task which would have been difficult if the path had been clear and covered with velvety moss instead of being rough, crowded, and thick with dust. One elderly man seemed at the end of his strength when he had completed his self-appointed penance, although two friends had accompanied him and lifted him over drains and other hindrances.

'Many of those who had made a vow to undergo torture had prepared their bodies the preceding month by some form of penance, and had refrained from eating for a day before the event.

'While these zealots were proceeding with their tasks, a bed of coals was being prepared. Great piles of wood were burned to embers; then the ashes were raked into a neat bed about 24 feet long. It seemed hours to us before it reached this stage, as the atmosphere was rendered almost unbearable by the intense heat.

'At the end of the mass of live coals was dug a pool which was filled with milk brought to the spot in earthenware jars. The images of the gods were then brought from the temple and placed near this pool of milk.

'When all seemed in readiness, we heard the sound of drums and a stir of excitement swept over the crowds. This we were told signified the return of devotees from the Serangoon Road Temple, whither they had gone to complete final preparations.

<sup>1</sup>'The Fire-Walking Hindus of Singapore', by L. Elizabeth Lewis, in *The National Geographic Magazine*, Washington, D.C., Vol. LIX, No. 4, April 1931, pp. 513-22 (12 illustrations).

The next instant two men appeared with a goat, one holding the frightened creature's head and the other a hind leg. Another man raised a scythe-like knife and in an instant the head was severed from the body.

'A fourth participant snatched the quivering, bleeding body and ran around the bed of coals, then disappeared in the throng.

'By this time I was feeling desperately ill, but with no possible chance for escape, for the crowds were now in a frenzied state, and it would have been unsafe to leave our refuge. The staring eyes of the devotees seemed glued upon the idols at the other end of the path of glowing embers.

'Finally, the priests who held back the devotees began to lash them with whips, and one by one they made a dash, barefooted, across the red-hot coals into the pool of milk.

'Each participant wore a short covering of cheesecloth stained yellow by saffron water, and each carried in his hands, clenched above his head, a twig of green from a tree supposed to possess curative properties. The wrists were tied together with yellow amulets. If the person was pure, the amulet would remain unbroken. I did not see any break.

'The priests would sometimes strike a devotee several times, and then give the wrists a stinging blow before releasing him. Not one flinched, nor did any appear to have felt the cut of the whip. Some ran and some walked slowly through the coals.

'The women seemed much calmer than the men. Some of them carried babies in their arms. One woman with a child fell when she had covered almost half the distance. The child was snatched from the embers, but the mother was rolled over several times before she was removed from the hot bed. Whether or not she was burned I could not tell, but she seemed on the point of exhaustion.

'A legend seems to be at the base of the origin of this ceremony. The Pandus—five brothers who reigned in former Hastinapura, 60 miles from modern Delhi, had one queen,

Draupadi, the deity invoked at this festival. These five kings had some cousins who envied their position. Duryodhana, their leader, conceived a plan whereby he could obtain the coveted kingdom. He invited the Pandus to a gambling party at his palace and through trickery won their kingdom.

'Duryodhana then sent for the queen and endeavoured to disrobe her in public. A higher power protected her chastity by making her garments unending. Through sheer exhaustion, Duryodhana finally gave up his attempt to disrobe Draupadi, who then untied his turban and vowed that she would not re-twine it until her enemies had been destroyed, and then she would bathe in fire as a proof of her chastity.

'A war followed, and when the Pandus were the victors Draupadi performed her vow. So to-day she is worshipped as one of the seven goddesses of chastity, and even the mention of her name is enough to "wipe away all sins".

'Walking through fire has become a custom for the curing of bodily ills or the overcoming of other calamities.'

As fire-walking comes well within the domain of psychical research, the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation decided they would make an attempt to elucidate the mystery, and to that end I inserted an advertisement in the personal column of *The Times*<sup>1</sup> inviting amateur and professional fire-resisters to come forward and perform the feat. We had hundreds of letters from those who had seen the fire-walk, and from those who wanted to see it, but not a single reply from anyone who was prepared to do it.

I had given up hope of finding a person in this country willing to demonstrate fire-walking, when Kuda Bux arrived in London in order to show us his alleged 'eyeless sight'. The reader has already read the account of these experiments. Quite casually Kuda Bux remarked to Mr. R. S. Lambert that he had frequently performed *Treemiri* in India, and produced his Press-

<sup>1</sup>For Oct 23, 1934.

cutting book to prove that his statement was correct. He was then about to leave for the Continent, but he agreed to remain in London a few weeks longer in order that I could stage an experimental fire-walk, under scientific conditions.

The next question was how to test Kuda Bux. Of course, it was difficult to determine his mental state at the time of 'walking', but certain physical tests could be applied. A number of scientists were appealed to, but it was generally agreed that no one in this country knew anything about fire-walking. We received several suggestions. Professor Frank L. Hopwood, D.Sc., the physicist at St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College (University of London), was very helpful. He suggested X-raying the man's feet. If they were 'doctored' by impregnation with any metallic salt or element heavier than sodium, the skiagram would show it. But it would not reveal organic compounds unless they contained iodine or the like. Another proposal was that we should take the temperature of the soles of the feet immediately before and after the trial. A third suggestion was that a cold mirror should be held near the soles of the feet to see whether any semi-volatile liquid covered them, thus producing the 'spheroidal state' which might act as a heat insulating layer. Another physicist said the 'cotton test' might prove valuable. It is well known that flesh scorches at a lower temperature than cotton; consequently, if the fire should burn the cotton, it ought to burn Kuda Bux's feet as well. Another obvious test was to measure the surface heat of the fiery trench by means of a thermocouple; and, if it was thought that the ash acted as an insulator between fire and feet, then the thermal conductivity of the ash must be ascertained.

It was obvious that, as we knew so little about staging a fire-walk, a rehearsal was a vital necessity. My friend, Mr. Alex. L. Dribbell, of The Halt, Woodmansterne Road, Carshalton, placed his house and grounds at my disposal, and I selected a site which was not only perfect for the experiments, but was also a



REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE TIMES

Kuda Bux's feet being medically examined by physician immediately before first trial at final fire-walk, September 17, 1935



REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE TIMES

Mr Digby Moynagh attempting the fire-walk at final test,



natural stage set in beautiful surroundings. The first test was held on Monday, September 9, 1935.<sup>1</sup>

Two tons of oak logs, one ton of firewood, half a load of oak charcoal, ten gallons of paraffin, twenty-five copies of *The Times*—and a box of matches. This was the incendiary material used in the first fire-walk ever seen in Great Britain. Kuda Bux ('Professor K. B. Duke'), the Kashmiri magician, walked bare-footed over more than three tons of wood reduced to red-hot embers which had been burning and smouldering for several hours. The test attracted a distinguished company of scientists, and important data were secured concerning the technique of fire-walking.

One thing I discovered was that staging a fire-walk takes a good deal of organising, much hard work, and many hours' preparation. Though the walk did not take place until nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, most of the day, and all the previous evening were spent on making things ready.

The trench itself took one man six hours to dig. It was twenty-five feet long, three feet wide, and twelve inches deep. It was my original intention that our trench should be thirty yards long, ten feet wide, and twelve inches deep. Even to have half-filled this great trough with burning embers would have taken nearly fifty tons of wood! Fortunately, I consulted several works which gave accounts of fire-walks, both in India and elsewhere, and found that the trench we finally dug was about the average size.

By the merest chance we decided to lay the fire overnight. It took four people two and a half hours to do this. And they worked hard. First of all, sheets of back issues of *The Times* were rolled into balls and these formed the bottom layer in the trench. Then a ton of firewood (packing-cases, broken up), staves or sticks, were interlaced criss-cross along the whole of

<sup>1</sup>See 'Walking Through Fire', by Harry Price, in *The Listener*, London, for Sept. 18, 1935, Vol. XIV, No. 349, pp. 470-3 (12 illustrations).



the trench. Over the firewood were placed about three hundred oak logs built ridge fashion, with the apex of the ridge running parallel with the trench. A couple of tarpaulins were placed over the whole as a protection from possible rain.

As no native of this country has had any experience in making fire trenches, we were in a quandary as to when to light the fire. How long would three tons of wood take to burn into red-hot embers? Kuda Bux himself was rather uncertain, as he had had no experience in burning seasoned oak logs. The wood they burn in India for ceremonial fire-walks is of a certain kind; it is very hard and slow-burning. However, I judged that between three and four hours were necessary to reduce the wood, so at eleven o'clock on the morning of the test the officials assembled to ignite the mass.

We found that it was not at all an easy matter to light a huge bonfire buried in a trench. After two or three futile attempts with matches, we decided that we needed the paraffin which we had provided for such an emergency. By means of an enamel garage jug we soured the logs with paraffin, using one gallon for every two and a half feet. At 11.20 I ceremoniously applied a match at one end, and in five minutes the trench was a blazing inferno of flames and oily smoke which almost choked the bystanders. We had lighted the great fire.

The flames soon died down; the smoke cleared away, and the merry crackling of the stratum of firewood told us that all was well. We piled on the remainder of the logs. Fortunately our combustible material was dry, and in thirty minutes the logs themselves were well alight, and it was impossible to stand closer to the trench than three feet. At 12.10, one could not approach within six feet of the fire without feeling uncomfortably hot.

By the time the fire had been burning an hour, the logs had settled down, owing to the pine firewood having been reduced to ashes. The oak logs were converted into red embers covered

with a pure white ash, and were slowly burning through. At 12.45 Kuda Bux removed his shoes and socks in order to 'test the fire'. He planted one bare foot in the middle of the embers and stepped across the trench. He said it was all right, but that there was too much unburnt wood, and not enough fire. Immediately before Kuda Bux stepped into the trench, I threw on the fire a piece of writing paper: it took exactly three seconds to ignite. At 12.55 the Kashmiri again stepped into the trench with his bare foot and pronounced it 'fine'. He then said it was time to put on the top layer of forest-burnt charcoal, which we did. The charcoal was the purest we could find, and, to test its quality, Kuda Bux ate a piece and said it was 'good'.

The fire was now a mass of red-hot glowing logs, and one could not stand near it for more than a few seconds at a time. We had a staff of helpers, raking and smoothing out the embers, and they had to use wooden shields to protect their faces from the intense heat. At one o'clock, a piece of white paper dropped into the trench burst into flames upon contact. I tried to take a close-up of the trench with my cinematograph camera, but found I could not get near enough, owing to the heat. As the fire was now becoming perfect for the test, we decided to leave it and have some lunch.

If we discovered nothing else during our test, we learnt that fire-walkers *eat*. We all had a square meal, and although Kuda Bux's religion precluded his taking any animal food, he consumed a light lunch. There was no question of his having to fast in order to walk on red-hot embers: 'That is a fallacy', he said.

We arrived back at Carshalton at 2.30, and found that our fire was a glowing mass of red and black embers. We also discovered with some astonishment that our three tons of wood had been reduced to such an extent that the layer of fire was only about three inches. This rather upset Kuda Bux, who likes at least nine inches of embers in which to bury his feet. He

could give no clear reason for this, but said it was much more difficult to walk on a thin layer of fire. It appears to be part of the technique of fire-walking, and is a very important point for future research. Curiously enough, unless the bottom of the trench is completely covered with live embers, Kuda Bux cannot walk on it: it just burns him, though an observer would imagine that the bare base of the trench was not nearly so hot as the glowing embers. In order to make the layer of fire thicker, we raked the embers from one end, piling them on to the centre of the trench, which was now shortened to about twenty feet.

At 2.45, we were ready for the test. A number of scientists and others had arrived and the company included Mr. R. S. Lambert, the Editor of *The Listener*; Mr. Digby Moynagh, the Editor of *St. Batholomew's Hospital Journal*; two physicists; Dr. William Collier, an Oxford physician; Professor J. A. Gunn, the pharmacologist; Mr. and Mrs. Alex. L. Dribbell, and others. Kuda Bux said he was ready to demonstrate, and donned a long black cotton frock coat for the performance. I examined this (and his trousers) for concealed chemicals or other preparation.

Before the test commenced, it was necessary that Kuda Bux should be medically examined. A most important part of this examination was the inspection of his feet. Dr. Collier took several 'swabs', and pronounced his feet normal. The 'swabs' were subsequently handed to a pathologist, who reported that he could find nothing definite in the reactions, either inorganic or organic. In other words, the results were negative. I thought that the soles of Kuda Bux's feet were particularly soft. Of course, he always wears shoes, so there is no question of the skin having become hardened through his walking barefoot for long periods. His right foot was washed, and it is quite certain that no preparation or chemical was used to render him immune from burns. His feet were photographed before and after the demonstration, and other scientific tests and photographs were made and valuable data acquired.

Before Kuda Bux stepped into the trench, he carefully brushed away the ash from the embers. Sometimes he uses a fan for this purpose. Whatever else we discovered on this historic afternoon, we proved quite definitely that the ash plays no part in forming an insulating layer between the feet and the fire. Kuda Bux will not walk on ash: he prefers the red embers.

Kuda Bux stepped into the trench four times with a maximum of four steps during the first 'walk'. He did not run, but walked steadily. Unfortunately, the fire was not quite to his liking, as it was too shallow. In places, the fire had burnt down to the ground, and this worried him. 'I *must* have thick fire to walk on', he reiterated. But he did his best, and it was our fault that we did not have a fire that he could wade through. After the last trial, I threw in several pieces of paper, and they burnt on contact with the embers. Also, the trench was so hot that one could not go near it in comfort. (Twenty-four hours later the embers were just cool enough to lay the hand upon.) After the fourth trial Kuda Bux decided that he would not 'walk' again, as the fire was not thick enough. After the final walk his feet were examined and photographed: they were not affected in any way, and there was not a suspicion of a blister.

After Kuda Bux had demonstrated that fire-walking is a possibility, we applied the 'cotton test' to the fire. We procured a wooden shoe last (attached to a rod), and covered it with calico. Imitating a person walking, we placed the wooden 'foot' to the embers over which Kuda Bux had just walked. In one second the calico was scorched; in two and a half seconds the cotton fabric was burnt through in several places. There was no question of the fire not being hot! The temperature of the heat above the fire was also taken.

After the cotton test, Mr. Digby Moynagh removed his shoes and socks and momentarily placed one bare foot against the embers. He said it was 'hot' and half an hour later his foot still tingled. Not satisfied with this test, he suggested to the medical

men present that he should walk in the trench. After some consultation, they advised him not to. Kuda Bux also warned him against making the attempt. Mr. Moynagh asked me what he should do. Although naturally I was averse to his burning himself, as Mr. Moynagh was anxious to make the experiment, I consented. It was necessary in the interests of science that someone should do the identical walk at the same time as Kuda Bux, with the same fire and under identical conditions. I will take this opportunity of thanking Mr. Moynagh for his courageous and public-spirited action.

Mr. Moynagh again removed his shoes and socks and, after a moment's hesitation, stepped boldly into the fire, and walked two paces before jumping out. He was in the trench about two seconds. He said that it was hot, and that his feet tingled. For some time he felt nothing further, but in thirty minutes blisters had formed on the soles of his feet and he had to receive attention at the hands of the trained nurse who was in readiness in case of accidents. He was somewhat badly burned, and felt the effects of his fire-walking adventure for some time afterwards. I examined the soles of his feet, and the epidermis seemed fairly thick and hard. I am sure that my own feet would have been still more badly burned. Mr. Moynagh's performance concluded the afternoon's programme (it was nearly five o'clock), except that Kuda Bux gave us a demonstration of his so-called 'eyeless sight' faculty, which impressed every person who witnessed it. I have already described his performance in the chapter 'The Man with the X-ray Eyes'.

It now only remains for me to say what we thought of the experiment. Undoubtedly, Kuda Bux walked on the fire, and it is equally true that he was not burnt. If we did not completely solve the riddle of fire-walking, at least we narrowed the inquiry. We proved that the feat is not dependent upon there being ash on the fire: on the contrary, considerable pains were taken to get rid of the ash, which is *not* utilised as an insulator



*Kuda Bux's feet, quite unjured, after fire-walk rehearsal. September 9, 1935*



between fire and feet. We proved that—in the case of Kuda Bux—fasting is not necessary, and that he does not have to work himself up into an exalted or ecstatic condition: he appeared so unconcerned that he might have been walking across the room. We could detect no trickery in the Kashmiri's performance, which appeared perfectly straightforward, and no preparation of the feet was thought possible, under the conditions.

So we asked ourselves what was the secret of the fire-walk. Three alternatives were left to us: (a) that it is done by 'faith'; (b) that the callosity of the skin is responsible for the absence of burning or pain, during the momentary contact of the feet with the embers, though this cannot apply to Kuda Bux as his feet are soft; (c) that a knack in placing the feet is the cause of Kuda Bux's immunity from burns. Or perhaps, in the case of some fire-walkers, there is a way in arranging the fire in such a manner that—with courage—one can walk through the embers without being burnt. Kuda Bux was unhappy about the fire we prepared for him, and it must be admitted that he did not stay in the trench very long. But we are grateful to him for the demonstration, which will become historic. We decided that for the next test we would burn much more wood, and allow Kuda Bux to inspect the trench before being filled.

We did not prove that Kuda Bux can transfer his immunity from burns to other persons. He claims to do this, and I hoped that at the next test he would demonstrate that it can be done. In the traditional Indian fire-walk, as the reader has seen, it is a common sight to see a troupe of devotees following their leader or priest through the trench: they emerge unscathed.

We acquired some valuable knowledge resulting from our first experiment. The thermal conductivity of the ash was ascertained, and as this was a laboratory job, it could not be done *in situ*. There was no evidence that the ash played any part in the performance. But the wood and charcoal have to be



of a certain quality, and this may have some bearing on Kuda Bux's ability to perform the 'walk'. He informed me that the only thing that will burn him is cow dung. One piece in a fire would, he said, make it impossible for him to do the walk. The reason is that it is 'unclean' to a fire-walker. As a matter of fact, it is alleged that any foreign matter in the fire upsets the performance.

The second test was held on Tuesday, September 17, 1935, on the same site at Carshalton. It will be remembered that Kuda Bux was not happy concerning the lack of fire we provided for him at the first 'walk', although more than three tons of material were burnt; also, the trench was too narrow (three feet). At our second test we burnt seven tons of oak logs, one ton of firewood, half a ton of oak charcoal, ten gallons of paraffin, and fifty newspapers. The trench was widened to six feet, and the depth reduced to nine inches. On the afternoon previous to the test, Kuda Bux inspected the trench and stated that he wanted a 'platform' of earth in the centre. Thus he constructed himself, and divided the trench into two portions or pits, with a mound of earth thirty-six inches wide dividing them in the centre. The length (twenty-five feet) was not altered. So now we had what were really two trenches, placed end to end, each being eleven feet long, six feet wide, and nine inches deep. I think the real reason for this division in the trench was because Kuda Bux wanted to shorten it; and jumping on to a platform at one end of a short pit was more dignified than stepping off half-way across a long one.

It took one man the best part of a working day to fill the trenches. All the newspapers and firewood, and half of the logs, were piled into two pyramids and covered with tarpaulins for the night. It was our intention to light the fires at five o'clock on the morning of the test. But a fierce gale made this impossible, and it was 8.20 a.m. before the mass was ignited. It was a magnificent sight to see the flaming paraffin as the wind swept

it through the piles of logs and packing-cases. By 8.45 both trenches were well alight.

We spent the morning in feeding the fires with the remaining three and a half tons of logs, and by one o'clock the trenches were a mass of red embers, radiating a terrific heat. The wind shifted every few seconds, and with each gust showers of sparks and ash nearly smothered the helpers, who were blinded by the heat-laden wind which made stoking almost impossible. The wearing of goggles relieved us somewhat, but I had a rain-coat scorched through merely throwing on a log. The heat could be distinctly felt at a distance of sixty-five feet, on the leeward side of the trenches.

After lunch the red embers just filled the trenches flush with the ground. It was still blowing half a gale, and as the wind swept across the fires they were fanned almost to white-heat. It reminded me of a mighty blacksmith's forge at full blast. With each gust all the ash was blown from the surface of the fires.

At 2.30 Kuda Bux had a look at the fires, said they were satisfactory, and instructed us to tip on the load of forest-burnt charcoal. This was in sacks which we divided between the two trenches. As each sack was tipped on to the trench a man raked the charcoal evenly over the surface. It will give the reader some idea of the heat of the trenches when I remark that every minute or so the handle of the rake caught fire and had to be extinguished! It can be imagined how the one hundred and thirty-two square feet of surface area of the fire affected the spectators, among whom were: Professor J. C. Flugel, Mr. C. E. M. Joad, Mr. C. A. Mace, Professor C. A. Pannett, Mr. S. G. Soal, the Rev. Professor E. S. Waterhouse, and the present writer (all members of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation). Others present included Mrs. Flugel, Mrs. Mace, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Dribbell, Mr. R. S. Lambert, Professor Millaus Culpin, Dr. J. Edgley Curnock,

Dr. R. E. Gibbs, Dr. A. S. Russell, Dr. E. H. Hunt, Dr. T. E. Banks, etc.

Having put on the top dressing of charcoal, the surface of the fires was transformed from a rich cherry colour to a dull black, and we waited patiently for the lumps of charcoal to redden. This took less than half an hour owing to the high wind increasing the surface combustion. By three o'clock the charcoal was red hot.

Kuda Bux said he was now ready for the preliminary examination. The medical member of our council, Professor C. A. Pannett, Director of the Surgical Unit, St. Mary's Hospital (and Professor of Surgery, University of London), examined the Kashmiri. He stated that the soles of his feet presented no unusual features. The skin was not callous, but soft. The feet felt cold to the hand, and a skin thermometer applied to the soles registered  $93.2^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit. He said the skin was very dry. The feet were then washed and well dried. A five-eighths inch square of zinc oxide plaster was attached to the sole of the right foot. After a few minutes Kuda Bux said he was ready for the test.<sup>1</sup>

At 3.14 Kuda Bux made the first walk, doing four strides (each foot on the embers twice). From the moment the first foot was removed from the bank until the last foot left the trench was 4.5 seconds, official timing. Kuda Bux walked steadily, and jumped on to the platform between the two fires. He returned to the base where, within ten seconds, Professor Pannett again took the temperature of the soles of his feet: it was now  $93^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit—which, of course, was actually lower than before the walk. The piece of plaster was quite untouched, except that some loose fluff at the cut edges looked very slightly scorched. The man's feet were neither blistered nor injured.

<sup>1</sup>For Professor Pannett's full report, see *Nature*, Vol. 136, No. 3438, Sept. 21, 1935. Also *The Lancet* for Sept. 28, 1935; and 'Fire-Walking Experiments', by Harry Price, in *The British Medical Journal* for Sept. 28, 1935.



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Kuda Bux walking on red-hot charcoal at first trial during final test.  
September 17, 1935



At 3.17 Kuda Bux once more stepped on to the same pit, and again did four strides (each foot on the embers twice), taking 4.3 seconds. He would not walk across the second (farther) pit as he said there was 'something wrong with it'. Of course, this disinclination to walk the second pit was psychological, as both pits were identical in every way. His feet were again examined and found to be uninjured. Forty-eight minutes later Professor Pannett again examined his feet, and no injury was apparent.

After the second walk, the physicists took the temperatures of both the surface and the main body of the fire. The temperature-measuring device was an electric thermometer consisting of a thermal junction connected to a temperature indicator. The junction consisted of a thin disc of copper, to which wires of copper and eureka were fastened. The wires were passed through holes in a piece of uralite and pulled, in order to bring the disc into contact with the uralite, so that when the disc was pressed on the fire the conditions were favourable for the absorption of heat and its retention when the junction was raised for another impact. It was found that the main body of the fire was  $1400^{\circ}$  Centigrade ( $2552^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit), which is exactly the temperature of white heat (steel melts at  $1371^{\circ}$  Centigrade). The surface of the fire was  $430^{\circ}$  Centigrade ( $806^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit), the temperature between that at which coal ignites and dull red heat. The thermal data were supplied to me by Dr. R. E. Gibbs.

Kuda Bux then prepared to walk the trench a third time; he stood on the edge, then asked for five minutes' grace, and finally came to me and said he could not do it again. The instruments and the tests had unnerved him. 'Something inside me has broken', he told me. 'You are not angry with me, are you?' I tried to comfort him by saying that he had put up an excellent show, and had done his best. 'I have lost my faith, and if I do it again, I shall burn myself,' he said.

After the Kashmiri had finished his performance, Mr. Digby

Moynagh (who, it will be remembered, entered the trench at the previous experiment on September 9, 1935) said he would again attempt the walk. He removed his shoes and socks, walked into the pit, and did two steps (*i.e.* each foot on the embers once: 2.2 seconds). As his feet were covered with healing blisters which he acquired on his last fire-walk, it was difficult to tell what fresh blisters he had acquired, but he could not walk the length of the trench. It was noticed that his feet were moister than those of Kuda Bux. It was exceedingly plucky of him to try the experiment a second time. After Mr. Moynagh's performance, Mr. Maurice Cheepen stepped into the trench and gave two quick, short steps (*i.e.* each foot on the embers once: 2.1 seconds) before reaching the bank. Actually, he crossed the corner of the trench. His feet were badly blistered, and I saw bleeding at three points. These wounds might have been caused by the burnt skin rubbing off the soles of his feet as he hurried out of the trench. It was a plucky attempt. We had a trained nurse available in case of accidents, so the 'wounded' received every assistance. As there were no other volunteers forthcoming, we adjourned for the tea interval. After tea Kuda Bux gave another 'eyeless sight' demonstration which was very successful.

One of those present at the fire-walk was Dr. E. H. Hunt, a medical man who had seen ceremonial fire-walking in Southern India (where he resided for many years), and he told the representative of *The Times*<sup>1</sup> that the test was made under unusually severe conditions which would have deterred most fire-walkers. He said: 'The trench is shallower than is customary and with the high wind increasing the surface combustion and blowing away all the ash the heat is far more intense and is transmitted without any insulation. The test was too severe. . . .' All the more credit, then, to Kuda Bux for demonstrating his

<sup>1</sup>See *The Times*, London, Sept. 18, 1935 (No. 47,172), for an account of the second experiment (3 illustrations).

ability to 'walk' over such an intensely hot trench. His sudden breakdown after the second walk seems to indicate that, after all, 'faith' (or confidence) plays some part in the performance. I think that may be the secret of the fire-walk. After that faith had 'broken' within him, nothing would induce him to do the walk. He was not in a fit mental condition. We proved that the immunity from burns is not due to the callosity of the skin, as Kuda Bux has soft skin, which is not callous. We exploded the theory that ash acts as an insulator between feet and fire, as the wind and our rakes removed it all. We have proved that it is a fallacy that 'anyone can do it'. There was no proof that the feet were prepared in any way, and we were successful in providing an even hotter fire than is usual in India—thanks partly to the high wind. Speaking of the intense heat, at ten o'clock on the evening of the test the trenches looked like two huge cauldrons of red-hot molten metal, reminiscent of what I have seen at smelting works. Although the night was quite dark, one could easily read a copy of a newspaper by the glow of the red-hot embers. By noon next day the fire was still too hot for one to place one's hand upon.

The reader is now able to compare the cool and dignified performance of Kuda Bux with the hysterical 'ballyhoo' of native fire-walks. Considering that the Kashmiri walked on a fire much hotter than anything seen in India, the greatest credit is due to him. We have not completely solved the mystery of fire-walking, but we are very near to a solution. I think the secret of immunity from burns lies in the fact that, in the case of Kuda Bux, there is some obscure relationship between physical and mental forces, and this helps to make him immune from injury. I think he also works himself up into a kind of semi-hypnotic state. Apparently, that state is easily disturbed, witness how he broke down after the second attempt at our experiment on September 17, 1935. The scientists upset him. He told Professor Pannett that the physicist who placed the thermocouple



who insist upon knowing how much things cost that we expended about £50 on our two experiments. This sum includes fees, material (the wood alone cost £25), labour, photography, films, etc. We secured a magnificent photographic and cinematographic record of the ceremony, which is destined to become historical.<sup>1</sup> But I must admit that it was a somewhat expensive bonfire!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Gresham Reynolds, in *The Times* of Sept. 24, 1935, points out the extreme antiquity of fire-walking and quotes Virgil (*Aeneid* XI, 787, 788):

'Et medium freti pietate per ignem

Cultores multa premimus vestigia pruna.'

These lines are taken from Arruns's prayer to Apollo for permission to wipe out the disgrace that has been inflicted on the Trojans in Italy by Camilla, the Queen of the Volsci. *Freti pietate* suggests that, even among the ancients, fire-walking was considered a trial of faith; *cultores* denotes that it was practised under the cult of Apollo.

<sup>2</sup>For the official record, see: 'A Report on Two Experimental Fire-Walks', by Harry Price, *Bulletin II* of the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation, London, 1936 (20 illustrations and a Bibliography).

## INDEX



## Index

- Aachen, 74  
 Abbaye, Rue de l', Paris, 78  
 Aberystwyth, 348  
 Abrams, Albert, 237-52  
 Abu Nasser (magician), 351-4  
*Account (An) of Some Further Experiments with Rudi Schneider*, 87 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Account of Some Further Experiments with Willis Schneider*, 259 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Adam, Professor, 306  
 Adams, Mrs. Mary, 348  
 Adarc, Viscount, 149 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Adelphi Theatre, 46-7  
 Adlerhalle, Interlaken, 297-311  
*Adventures in Many Lands*, 257  
*Aeneid*, 380 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Aesop's Fables*, 89  
 Aga Khan, 345  
 Air Ministry, 237  
 Aix-la-Chapelle, 74  
 Akhnur, Kashmir, 314  
 Aldrich, A. S., 81-2  
 Alexis, 271, 271 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Alimarchite (Martian ruler), 119-22  
 Alpine ghost, 50-1  
 American S.P.R., 82, 88 n<sup>2</sup>, 211, 333  
 Amersham Hall, Lewisham, 15 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Amiens Medical School, 101  
 Amsterdam, 73, 75  
*Amusements Physiques*, 253 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Ancient ghost-hunting, 37-8  
 Anderson, John Henry, 254  
 Angers (Touraine), 330  
*Animal Metapsychics*, 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
*Ansichten über die Angeblich Neue Entdeckung von Odognostischen Photographien*, 168 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Answers*, 254 n<sup>1</sup>
- Apollo, 380 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Apports, meaning of, 142, 159-60  
*Arabian Nights*, 89  
 Arabian rope trick, 351-4  
 Arc de Triomphe, Paris, 333  
 Arnaoudoff, M. D., 355 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Arruns's prayer to Apollo, 380 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Art et Hypnose, L'*, 268 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Assebourg, Graf von, 52-4  
*Astonishing 'Mind-Reading' Feats of the Three Svengalis*, 256 n<sup>2</sup>, 266 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Athens, 82  
 Atkinson, Mrs. Paul, 269  
 Auckland, N Z., 111-2 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Augustenstrasse, ghost of the, 47-9  
 Australian wild dog, 88  
 Austrian Alpine Club, 293  
*Automatic Art of Heinrich Nusslein*, 77 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Automatism, meaning of, 141  
 Ayrton, W. E., 195
- B—, Rev George, 104-7  
 Babylon, 351  
 Bacharach (Rhine), 335  
 Baden-bei-Wien, 51-2  
 Ballenstedt, Harz, 52  
 Barlow, Fred, 169, 169 n<sup>2</sup>, 202 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Barto ('talking' horse), 88  
 Barton-Wright, E., 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Bathroom control', 163, 207  
 Bauer, Café, Berlin, 65, 67  
 Baum, Vicki, 65  
*Bealings Bells*, 28 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Bear, Norwegian, regarded as human, 88  
 Beard, G. M., 255, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Beauregard, Rue, Paris, 334

- Beckmann, Johann, 255, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Bed, haunted, at Falkenstein, 53-4;  
   at Chuswick, 75-6  
*Bedeutung von Goethes I*, 340  
 Boenham, Miss Ethel, 279-85, 315,  
   348  
*Beiträge zur Geschichte der Erfindungen*,  
   255  
 Belgian police, 74  
 Belgian steamers, 75  
 Bell, F. N. C., 157 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Bell-ringing, supernormal, 27-35  
 Bellini, Ernesto, 256, 256 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Bénévol, 256, 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Bendey, Phyllis, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Bergson, Henri, 312  
*Berichte der Deutschen Chemischen  
 Gesellschaft*, 189 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Berlin, 65-70, 189 n<sup>1</sup>, 259, 259 n<sup>2</sup>,  
   306, 318-21, 351, 351 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Berlin University, 306  
*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 351,  
   351 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, 66  
 Bern, 301  
 Bernese Oberland, 130  
 Bernhardt, Sarah, 102  
 Billet-reading trick, 104-7  
 Bird, J. Malcolm, 88 n<sup>4</sup>, 202-3  
 Birmingham, 129  
 Bishop, Claude, 111-4  
 Bishop, Washington Irving, 270,  
   270 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Bismarck, Prince, 53  
 Black Bear ('thinking' pony), 88,  
   88 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Black Book (German), 335-7  
 Blackpool, 174  
 Blandy, Mrs. Lizzie Davenport, 271  
*Blick in die Tiefen der Seele, Ein  
 (film)*, 297-300, 306-11  
 Blitz, Mousche, 259  
 'Blokberg Tryst' experiment, 334-  
   43  
 'Blue Room', alleged haunted, 26-  
   35
- Bohn, Erich, 338  
 Bohn, Frä. Urta, 338-9  
 Boirac, E., 312  
 Bond Street, London, 334  
 Bosch, Professor, 306  
 Boston (Mass.), 168, 176 n<sup>1</sup>, 255 n<sup>4</sup>,  
   271  
 Boursnell, Richard, 168  
 Boyle, Robert, 322  
 Brahmanic gods, 360  
 Brandon, Roy, 170 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Brandt, Rolf, 306  
 Braunau-am-Inn, 227  
 Breslau, 338  
 Briarcliff, U.S.A., 88, 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
*Briarcliff Pony, The*, 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Brighton, 114, 148  
 Bristol, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Britannia Secunda (Uriconium), 42  
 British Broadcasting Company, Ltd.,  
   240  
 British Broadcasting Corporation,  
   97, 266, 348  
 British Institute of Adult Education,  
   348  
*British Medical Journal, The*, 374 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Broad, C. D., 11 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Brocken experiment, 334-43  
*Brocken-Post*, 343  
 Brown Bros., Ltd., 239  
 Brown, Guy B., 278-85  
 Brown, J. W., 348  
 Browne, Sir Thomas, 322  
 Brunschvicq, Leon, 312  
 Brussels, 74  
 Budapest, 73-4  
 Buguet, Édouard, 168, 168 n<sup>2</sup>, 197 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Bukarest, 82  
*Bulgarische Festbräuche*, 355 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Bulletins of Nat. Lab. Psychical Re-  
 search*, 87 n<sup>1</sup>, 155 n<sup>2</sup>, 227 n<sup>1</sup>,  
   233 n<sup>1,2</sup>, 234 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Bulletins of the University of Lon-  
 don Council for Psychical In-  
 vestigation*, 272, 272 n<sup>1,2</sup>, 380 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Burg Falkenstein, 52-4

- Burlington House, 229  
 Burrows, J. F., 266 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Burt, Cyril, 262, 314  
 Burt, Mrs. Cyril, 314, 316  
 Bury Road case, 55-64  
 Bux, Kuda (see Kuda Bux)
- Cage, gauze, for medium, 152-3  
 Cairo, 211  
 Calais, 75  
*Calculating Boys*, 271 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Cambridge, 11 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Camilla, Queen of the Volsci, 380 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Canberra, Australia, 225  
 Candlestick phenomenon, 31  
 Capper, Alfred, Edward and Nellie, 256, 256 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Capucines, Boulevard des, Paris, 77  
 Carancini (medium), 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Carington, W. Whately, 241 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Carlo', 'spirit' guide, 112-3  
 Carmencita, 269  
 Carshalton, Surrey, 364-80  
 Caruso, Enrico, 38  
 Cashel, Ireland, 329  
 Cenotaph 'spirits', 169-70  
 Central Hotel, Berlin, 65, 319  
 Chambre Ardente, Paris, 334  
 Chance Bros. & Co., Ltd., 129  
*Charge of Fraud . . . Against Mr. John Myers*, 170 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Charles I, 76  
 Château Frontenac Hotel, Quebec, 220, 224  
 Cheepen, Maurice, 376, 379  
 Chelmsford broadcasting station, 240-52  
 Cherub phenomenon, 59-60  
 Chicago, 104, 179 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Chichester, Sussex, 324  
 'Child, psychic', 82-4  
 Chiswick, 75-6  
*Chronicles of Spirit Photography*, 198 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Chung Ling Soo', 163 n<sup>1</sup>, 200 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Church bells affect piano, 38
- 'Cissie' (spirit), 179  
 Clairaudience, meaning of, 141  
 Clairvoyance, meaning of, 141  
 Clark, Doctor, 214-8  
*Cleverest Child in the World, The*, 271 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Coach and horses, alleged supernatural, 27-35  
*Cold Light on Spiritualistic 'Phenomena'*, 169 n<sup>2</sup>, 190 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Collier, William, 368  
 Collins, Warner, 205  
 Cologne, 65, 72; (Hauptbahnhof), 73  
*Coming of the Fairies*, 175 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Compte Rendu Officiel du Troisième Congrès*, 101 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 346  
 Concordia Hütte, 50-1  
 Concordia-Platz, 50  
 Confederacy at Rudi Schneider's séances, 230-1  
 Conjurers and Indian Rope Trick, 344-54  
*Contact Mind-Reading*, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Controlling a medium, 150-8  
*Convincing Phenomena at Munich*, 226 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Cook, Miss Florrie, 161  
 Copenhagen, 138, 211  
 Coquelin, 102-3  
*Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 77 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Cotton test, 364, 369  
 Coué, Émile, 308  
*Counterblast to Spookland*, 179 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Cox, Thomas, 70  
 'Crewe Circle', 169  
 Cromwell, Oliver, 42, 76  
 Crookes, Sir William, 161, 161 n<sup>1, 2</sup>  
 Cryptomnesia, meaning of, 143  
 Cullender, Rose, 322  
 Culpin, Millais, 272, 373  
 Cumberland, Stuart, 255, 255 n<sup>1</sup>, 263-4, 272  
 Curnock, J. Edgely, 272, 373  
 Czechoslovakia, 138, 276

- Daemmerung, Gottlieb, 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Daily —, 25, 33, 36  
 Daily Express, 61, 128 n<sup>1</sup>, 268 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Daily Mail, 99, 331 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Daily News, 268 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Daily Sketch, 169, 170, 170 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Daily Telegraph, 238 n<sup>1</sup>, 268 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Darby, Arthur Claud, 347  
 Dark, Sidney, 269 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Dausset, Dr., 101  
 Davenport Brothers, 260, 270-1,  
 271 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Davies, C. M., 269 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Day, J. F., 270-1  
 Deane, Mrs A. E., 169, 170, 170 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Delhi, 362  
 Delphi, 99  
 Dennis, Miss Gene, 259-66  
*Des Indes à la Planète Mars*, 118 n<sup>1</sup>  
*De Spectris*, 37 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Dessoir, Max, 306  
 Devant, David, 257 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Devonshire witchcraft, 332-3  
 Diamond traveller, case of, 71-4  
 Didier, Alexis, 271, 271 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Dingwall, E. J., 159 n<sup>1</sup>, 233, 254 n<sup>2</sup>,  
 278-85  
 Direct voice, meaning of, 142  
 Dissociation of personality, 143  
 Dodona, 99  
*Does a 'Thinking Pony' Really Think?*  
 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
 'Dolores', 111-4  
*Dolores and his Magic Slates*, 112 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Dombies, 68  
 Dorotheenstrasse, Berlin, 68  
 Douglas, C. G., 235  
 Douglas, I.O.M., 92  
 Dover, 75  
 Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan, 77, 80,  
 169, 175 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Dracu, 71  
 Draupadi (Indian queen), 363  
 Dresden, 65  
 Dribbell, A. L., 260, 348, 364, 368,  
 373  
 Dribbell, Mrs. A. L., 368, 373  
 Driesch, Hans, 107  
 Duguid, David, 168, 168 n<sup>4</sup>, 169 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Duke, K. B.' (Kudd Bux), 14,  
 312-21, 355-6, 363-80  
 Duke University, N. Carolina, 314  
 Duncan, F. Martin, 91, 96  
 Duncan, Mrs. Helen, 155, 155 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Dundee, 162  
 Duny, Amy, 322  
 Du Prel, Carl, 269  
 Durville, André, 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Duryodhana, 363  
 Eastern Harz, 52  
 Echinocactus Williamsii, 85 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Ectoplasm, meaning of, 143, 164  
 Eiffel Tower, 85  
 Eisler, —, 292  
 'Elberfeld horses', 88, 227  
*Electric Girl, The*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Electronic Institute, 252  
 'Electronic reactions', 237-52  
 'Emergent theory', 11, 11 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Enciclopedia Italiana*, 253 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*,  
 168 n<sup>5</sup>, 169 n<sup>1</sup>, 197 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Erto, Pasquale, 154, 154 n<sup>1</sup>, 249  
*États Profonds de l'Hypnose, Les*, 269 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Eva C., 179  
 Evans, John, 223  
*Evening News*, 56, 58-60  
*Evening Standard*, 343  
*Evolution of Some Popular Conjuring  
 Tricks*, 253 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Exorcism, service of, 35  
*Expériences de Gênes avec le médium  
 Erto*, 154 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Experiment with Mr. John Myers*,  
 170 n<sup>4</sup>  
*Experimental Inquiries into Telekinesis*,  
 149 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Exposé of the Electric Girl*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Externalisation of heat, alleged, 77-  
 80  
 Extra-retinal vision, alleged, 312-21

- Extra-sensory perception, meaning of, 142  
*Eyeless Sight*, 312 n<sup>1</sup>
- F., Miss Mollie, 212-8  
*Fact and Fable in Psychology*, 176 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Fakir of Oolu', 271  
*Fakirwunder des geheimnisvollen Seils*, 351 n<sup>1</sup>
- Falconer brothers, 170, 170 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Falkenstein Castle, 52-4  
 Falkenstein, 'White Lady' of, 53-4  
 Farigoule, Louis, 312-3, 318  
*Faust*, 335, 340  
 Fay, Annie Eva, 197 n<sup>3</sup>, 270  
 Fay, William M., 270  
 Fire-walk, the, 355-80  
 Fire-walking (countries where practised), 355  
*Fire-Walking Experiments*, 374 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Fire-Walking Hindus of Singapore*, 361 n<sup>1</sup>
- Fitzkee, Daniel, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Fletcher, Peel, 278-85  
 Flournoy, Théodore, 117, 118, 118 n<sup>1</sup>, 128  
 'Flower Medium', 155-7  
 'Flower Medium's' Career, 157 n<sup>2</sup>  
 'Flower Medium's' Confession, 157 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Flower Medium' Exposed, 157 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Flower Medium': More Facts, 157 n<sup>2</sup>
- Flugel, J. C., 373  
 Flugel, Mrs. J. C., 373  
 Fodor, Nandor, 168 n<sup>5</sup>, 169 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Folk Lore Society, 331  
 Foltz, Karl, 234 n<sup>2</sup>  
 'Footsteps' phenomena, 28-9, 44-6  
 Forbes, John, 271, 271 n<sup>3</sup>  
 Forde, C. Daryll, 348  
 Fore-control of medium, 153-7  
 France, Anatole, 312  
 Frankfurt (Main), 72, 74  
 Fraser-Harris, D. F., 113  
 Frazer, Sir J. G., 88, 88 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Freedom' of Halberstadt, 342-3  
 Frey, Charles, 301-5, 310  
 Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, 65, 69, 319  
*From India to the Planet Mars*, 118, 118 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Fronczek, Janusz, 155  
 Fry, J., 278-85
- G., Magdeleine, 267-9, 269 n<sup>1, 2</sup>  
 Gaillard, Joanny, 100-1  
 Ganges (river), 360  
 Garlic to scare vampires, 328  
 Garner, Charles, 255  
 Garrett, Mrs Eileen, 12, 77  
 Garrick Theatre, 268  
 Gas-lighter phenomenon, 58  
 'Gef', the 'talking mongoose', 85-97  
 Geley, Gustave, 154 n<sup>2</sup>, 298  
 Geneva, 37 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Genoa, 330  
 'Geordie' ('spirit'), 179  
*Georgia Magnet, The*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Gerald', 'spirit' control, 131-9  
 German witchcraft, 334-45  
 Ghost-hunter's kit (description of), 31 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Ghost Stamp', 180, 187, 196  
 Gibbs, R. E., 374-5  
 Gibson, Walter B., 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Giddings, Mr. and Mrs. A. J., 256  
*Girl Medium Baffles all the Scientists*, 155 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Gladstone, W. E., 191  
 Gladstone, Mrs. W. E., 181  
*Glans penis as an aid to 'phenomena'*, 189  
 Glasgow, 255 n<sup>4</sup>  
*Glances of the Next State*, 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Goadby, Arthur, 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 335-40  
*Goethejahr* celebrations, 334-43  
*Goethenacht* on the Brocken, 334-41  
 Goldberg, Dr., 357-9  
*Golden Bough, The*, 88, 88 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Goldney, Mrs. A. Peel, 35, 156  
 Gore, —, 306-11  
 Göttingen, 341-2



- Göttingen University, 52, 255  
 'Grand Hotel', 65-70  
*Grand Hotel*, 65  
 Grands Boulevards, 77-80  
 Great Aletsch Glacier, 50  
 Great Bealings, Suffolk, 28 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Great Plague, relic of, 30  
 Gregory, Sir Richard, 170, 285  
 Grunewald, Fritz, 298  
 Gruyères, 301  
 Guildford, Surrey, 168 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Gunn, J. A., 368
- Haas, Gaston, 258, 298-311  
 Haas, 68  
 Halberstadt, 52, 342-3  
 Hale, Lord Chief Justice, 97, 322, 322 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Halifax, Viscount, 12 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Hall (Innsbruck), 50, 286  
 Hallett, James, 324, 327-8  
*Hamlet*, 37  
 Hampstead, 347  
 Hanover, 65  
 Hanschen ('talking' horse), 88  
 Hanussen, Erik Jan, 259, 259 n<sup>2</sup>, 319, 351, 351 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Hardwick, W. W., 134  
 Hartig, Rudolf, 340  
 Harz Mountains, 52-4, 334-43  
 Harzer Verkehrsverband, 338  
 Hastmapura, India, 362-3  
 Hatfield, 347  
*Hat Rudi Schneider in Paris geschwindelt?* 234 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Haunting of Cashen's Gap*, 97 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Havel (river), Germany, 67  
 Hayward's Heath, Sussex, 42  
 Heald, C. B., 237  
 Heber Arms, Wroxeter, 44  
 Heller, Robert and Haidée, 255  
*Hellerism*, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Henry, T. Shekelton, 179 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Heredia, C. M. de, 203  
 Hexentanzplatz, Harz, 336, 338  
 'High German Black Book', 335-7
- Hill, Sir Leonard, 379  
 Hillah, Arabia, 351  
 Hindenburg, Paul Ludwig von, 322  
 Hindu fire-walking, 356-63  
*History of Inventions*, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Hitler, Adolf, 228  
 Hofsten, Nils von, 233  
 Holbrook, Leroy H., 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Hollywood, 266, 266 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Home, D. D., 149, 149 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Homer (poet), 116  
 Hope, William, 169  
 Hopwood, Frank L., 364  
 Horace (poet), 336  
 Horder, Sir Thomas (now Lord), 237, 241  
 Houghton, Georgina, 198, 198 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Houses of Parliament, 174  
 Hove, Sussex, 114  
*How to Go to a Medium*, 159 n<sup>1</sup>  
*How to Pose as a Strong Man*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Howe, Ellic, 278-85  
 Howell, —, 197 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Hudson, F. A., 197-8  
 Hulse, Mary, 17-24  
 Hunt, E. H., 374, 376-7  
 Hurst, Lulu, 269, 269 n<sup>5</sup>  
 Huxley, Julian, 91, 170  
 Hymns at a *séance*, 114  
 Hyperaesthesia, examples of, 259-60, 272-85  
*Hypnose und Suggestion* (film), 297-311  
 Hypnotism, experiments in, 298-311  
 Hypnotism, meaning of, 142
- I Know Your Thoughts*, 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Ilford, Ltd., 206  
*Illusion and Disillusion*, 257 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Illusionismo*, 253 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Imperial Dry Plate Co., Ltd., 169  
 Impersonation, 143  
 Indian Rope Trick, 344-54  
 Innsbruck, 258, 286-96  
 Interlaken, 51, 297-311  
 'Invisible man', the, 109-11

- Irving, James T., 85-97  
 Irving, Mrs. J. T., 89-97  
 Irving, Miss Vourrey, 86-97  
 Irwin, H. C., 11, 12  
 Isle of Man, 85-97, 331  
 Isle of Man, absence of fauna, 95 n<sup>1</sup>
- Jably (alleged wizard), 331  
 Jackson, —, 278-85  
 James II, 323  
 James, Mrs. St. John (Mars medium)  
 124-9  
 Japanese magic mirrors, 194-6  
 'Jasper the Hermit', 326  
 Jastrow, Joseph, 176, 176 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Joad, C. E. M., 75-6, 314, 338-43,  
 347, 373  
 Johannesburg, 170  
*Journal*, Am. S.P.R., 77 n<sup>2</sup>, 88 n<sup>4</sup>,  
 101 n<sup>1</sup>, 158 n<sup>1</sup>, 180 n<sup>1</sup>, 208 n<sup>1</sup>,  
 228 n<sup>1</sup>, 259 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Journal*, British S.P.R., 169 n<sup>2,3</sup>,  
 202 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Junagadh, India, 378 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Jungfrauoch, 50, 130
- K — Manor, 25-35  
 Kahn, Ludwig, 289  
 Kansas, 261  
 Kappstein, Theodor, 306  
 Karachu (conjurer), 344-51  
 'Karlyn', 266 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Kassel, 336-7  
 Keeler, W. M., 171, 171 n<sup>1</sup>, 193-4  
 Kelvin, Lord, 176  
 Kensington Gardens, 174  
 Kenya witchcraft, 332  
 Keys, phenomenal happenings with,  
 28  
 'King, John', 161  
 'King, Katie', 161  
 'King of the Passes' (Mars), 122  
 Knoche, Fräulein Gerda, 52-4  
 Kohn-Abrest, Dr., 101  
 Korzarowa, Frau Dr., 306  
 Kosowaki, Doctor, 306
- Kotzian, Josef, 138  
 Krall, Karl, 227-8  
 Kraus, Josef, 259  
 Kronfeld, A., 306  
 Kuda Bux, 14, 312-21, 355-6, 363-  
 80  
 Kulturfilm, 297-311  
 Kur-bo-roo, Red Indian bear, 88  
 Kyder (conjurer), 344-51
- Lambert, R. S., 52-4, 92-7, 272-3,  
 314, 316-7, 346-8, 363, 368, 373  
 Lambert, Mrs. R. S., 272  
 Lancaster camera, 18-24  
*Lancet*, *The*, 271 n<sup>2</sup>, 374 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Laplace, Jeanne, 209-25  
 Lauterbrunnen, 130  
 Lavater, Ludwig (Lewes), 37, 37 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Le Méritoire camera, 18-24  
*Leaves from a Psychist's Case-Book*,  
 11, 12 n<sup>1</sup>, 63 n<sup>1</sup>, 71 n<sup>1</sup>, 149 n<sup>2</sup>,  
 150 n<sup>2</sup>, 153 n<sup>1</sup>, 154 n<sup>1</sup>, 162 n<sup>1</sup>,  
 163 n<sup>2</sup>, 168 n<sup>2</sup>, 170 n<sup>2</sup>, 197 n<sup>1</sup>,  
 208 n<sup>1</sup>, 249 n<sup>1</sup>, 259, 286 n<sup>1</sup>
- Lee, H., 379  
 Lehrte Station, Berlin, 67  
 Leipzig, 65, 107, 234 n<sup>2</sup>, 355  
*Leisure Hour*, 270 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Lewis, L. Elizabeth, 361, 361 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Leymarie, Mme. M. P. G., 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Libel, law of, and haunted houses, 36  
 Lina (medium), 269  
*Light*, 157 n<sup>1</sup>, 170 n<sup>2,4</sup>, 181  
*Light, Visible and Invisible*, 194 n<sup>1,2</sup>  
 Lisbon, 82  
*Listener*, *The*, 13, 92, 137 n<sup>1</sup>, 138 n<sup>1,2</sup>,  
 175, 186, 253 n<sup>1</sup>, 271 n<sup>4</sup>, 345,  
 345 n<sup>1</sup>, 346, 346 n<sup>1</sup>, 347, 349,  
 349 n<sup>1</sup>, 350, 350 n<sup>1</sup>, 365 n<sup>1</sup>, 368,  
 379, 379 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Liverpool, 93, 147  
 Lodge, Sir Oliver, 12, 12 n<sup>2</sup>, 99,  
 257 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Lodge, Raymond, 12, 12 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Lombroso, Cesare, 312  
*Lost Chord*, *The*, 268

- Löschchen-Lücke Pass, 51  
 Lourdes, 308  
 Lowry, Gerald, 263  
*Lulu Hurst (The Georgia Wonder)*,  
 269 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Lunar Apennines, 178  
 Luther, Martin, 53  
 Lyons, France, 100  
  
 MacCarthy, C. P., 180-2, 182 n<sup>1</sup>,  
 185  
 Macdonald, Alan, 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
 McDougall, William, 314, 316  
 McGregor, —, 217-18  
 McIndoe, J. B., 170, 170 n<sup>4</sup>  
 McIvor-Tyndall, Alexander J., 14,  
 259, 278-85  
 McKenzie, Mrs. Hewat, 157 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Mackenzie, William, 88 n<sup>2</sup>, 154 n<sup>3</sup>  
 MacMahon, Avenue, Paris, 333  
 Macpherson, Margaret, 112 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Macpherson, Sandy', 109-11  
 Mace, C. A., 373  
 Mace, Mrs. C. A., 373  
 Maeterlinck, Maurice, 88 n<sup>2</sup>, 227 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Magic Box (The)*, 238 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Magic Circle*, 170 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Magic Island (The)*, 68 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Magic mirrors, 194-6  
 Magicians' Club, 256  
*Magnetic Lady, The*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Magnin, Émile, 268, 268 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Maloitz, 14, 259-60, 272  
 'Man from Oshikoshi', 104-7  
*Man with the Multiple Mind, The*,  
 271 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Mannheim, 88, 88 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Marallet, M., 271  
 Marconi valves, 239  
 Marggrabowa, E. Prussia, 329  
 Maria-Theresienstrasse, Innsbruck,  
 293  
 Marion, 14, 259, 272-7  
 Mars machine, 119-20  
 'Mars' mediums, 117-39  
 Mars (planet), 13, 117-30  
 Marylebone, 345  
 Maskelyne, J. N., 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Maskelyne, Nevil, 257 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Materialisations-Phänomene*, 179 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Maxse, Sir Ivor, 354  
 Medical examination of a medium,  
 154  
 Mediumship and the law, 98-9  
*Meme Lebenslinie*, 259 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Mellon, Mrs. J. B., 179  
 Melting wax phenomenon, 77-80  
 Melton, F. R., 104, 104 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Mesmerism True—Mesmerism False*,  
 271 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Meyer, Stefan, 233  
 Michelangelo, 12  
 Microphotograph, meaning of,  
 199 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Mind over matter experiments, 107-8  
*Mind (The) and its Place in Nature*,  
 11 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Minehead, 41  
 Minsk, 60  
 Mitzi, 232, 235  
 'Mohawk Indians', 114 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Mohr, A. vor, 340  
 Mona, sheepdog, 93, 96  
*Monarchs and Muscle*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Mongoose, talking, of the Isle of  
 Man, 13, 85-97  
 Montespan, Madame de, 334  
 Moor, Edward, 28 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Moore, W. Osborne, 168, 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
*More Muscle Reading*, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Morris, Mrs Meurig, 99  
 Morrison, B., 34-5  
 Morton, Dr. Eva, 272  
 Moss, George H., 169  
 Mourne, mountains of, 95  
 Moynagh, Digby, 368-70, 375-6,  
 379  
*Mrs. Deane, a Cat, and a Catastrophe*,  
 170 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Muhamed ('talking' horse), 88  
 Muller, Catherine Éliez (Mars  
 medium), 117-8

- Multiple personality, 143  
 Mumler 'Spirits' Photograph Case, 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Mumler, William H., 168, 168 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Munich, 47-9, 179, 179 n<sup>2</sup>, 227, 241, 269  
 Murray, Gilbert, 264  
 Museum, haunted, 75-6  
 'Musical Medium', 259-60, 267-9, 269 n<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>  
*Musical Medium, The*, 269 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Myers Exposed Again?* 170 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Myers, F. W. H., 269  
 Myers, John, 170, 170 n<sup>4</sup>, 171
- Nash's Magazine*, 77, 77 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Nastnarki (fire-walkers), 355 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Natal Advertiser*, 357  
 Natal fire-walking, 356-60  
*National Geographic Magazine*, 359 n<sup>1</sup>, 361 n<sup>1</sup>  
 National Laboratory of Psychical Research, 9, 35, 38, 87 n<sup>2</sup>, 100-1, 131-9, 155 n<sup>2</sup>, 227 n<sup>1</sup>, 228-36, 233 n<sup>1, 2</sup>, 234 n<sup>1</sup>, 254 n<sup>2</sup>, 256, 260-2, 293  
*Nature*, 285, 374 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Nelson, N.Z., 225  
*Neue Freie Presse*, 233 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Neues 8 Uhr Blatt*, 233 n<sup>1</sup>  
 New York, 176 n<sup>1</sup>, 200 n<sup>1</sup>, 203 n<sup>1</sup>, 255, 255 n<sup>2</sup>, 332  
*New Zealand Advertiser*, 112 n<sup>1</sup>  
*New Zealand Observer*, 112 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Nicholl, J. M., 162  
 North Regional Station (B.B.C.), 97 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Norwich, 322  
 Note-taker's duty at *séance*, 151-2  
*Nouvelles Observations sur un Cas de Somnambulisme*, 118 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Nun, alleged ghost of, 26-30  
 Nun's Walk, the, 26-30  
 Nusslein, Heinrich, 77, 77 n<sup>2</sup>
- Occult Committee (Magic Circle), 170 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Of Ghosts and Spirites Walking by Nyght*, 37, 37 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Olerich, H., 271 n<sup>4</sup>  
 'Olga' (spirit), 227  
 Onondaga Indians, 332  
 Oomaruru (Martian lady), 124-8  
*Opinion, L'*, 154 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Optical 'magic', 109-11  
 Orient Express, 71-4  
 Oshkosh, Wis., 104-7  
 Oslo, 82, 211  
 Ossowiecki, Stéphan, 289  
 Ostend, 73-5  
*Our Secrets!* 254 n<sup>1</sup>, 257 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Oxford, 306  
 Oxford House Theatre, 345
- Paasch, Doctor, 306  
 Paix, Café de la (Paris), 76-80  
 Palladium music hall, 261-2, 264, 266  
 Palmer, W. H., 255  
 Pandus (Indian rulers), 362-3  
 Pannett, C. A., 373-6, 374 n<sup>1</sup>, 377  
 Paris, 76-80, 85, 101-3, 154 n<sup>1</sup>, 168, 168 n<sup>2</sup>, 209-25, 333-4  
 Paris, 'Black Mass' in, 333-4  
 Pariser-Platz, Berlin, 66-7  
 Paroptic perception, alleged, 312-21  
 'Parton Magna', Shropshire, 15-24  
 Passau, 74  
 Pauchet, Victor, 101  
 Pawleenoos (Martian giant), 125-8  
*Pearson's Magazine*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Pension ghost, the, 51-2  
*People I Have Read*, 255 n<sup>1</sup>  
*People, The*, 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Percival, The Misses, 32-5  
 Percival, Thomas, 26-35  
 Percival, Walter, 26-35  
 Perry, Nelson W., 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Peyotl, 85  
 Pfeffer, C. A., 340  
 'Pharaoh's rats', 87

- Phenomena of Materialisation*, 179 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Phenomena of Rudi Schneider*, 228 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Phénomènes lumineux*, 154 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Photographic control of medium,  
 153, 208  
*Photographic Times*, 176  
 Photographic tricks used by me-  
 diums, 172-208  
 Photomicrograph, meaning of,  
 199 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Physical Amusements*, 253 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Piccadilly Circus, 174  
 Picquart, Mme. Eugénie, 101-3  
 Pinetti de Wildalle, Giuseppe, 253,  
 253 n<sup>1</sup>, 254-5  
*Pious Meditation Upon a Broomstick*,  
 322  
 Plymouth, 345  
 'Poltergeist girl', 71  
 Poltergeist, meaning of word, 143  
 Poltergeist phenomena, 15-24, 26-  
 35, 42-52, 55-64  
 Pompeii, 42  
 Possession, 143  
 Potsdam, 67  
 Poulenc Frères, 80  
 Prague, 295, 328  
 'Prairie Flower', 'spirit' guide, 114,  
 114 n<sup>1</sup>, 115-6  
 Prato (Florence), 330  
 Precognition, meaning of, 142  
 'Preece, Henri', 77, 79  
*Preliminary Studies of a Vaudeville  
 Telepathist*, 272 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Prince, W. F., 171, 171 n<sup>2</sup>, 233  
 Priroz, Czechoslovakia, 138  
*Proceedings*, Am. S.P.R., 88 n<sup>2</sup>, 171 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Proceedings*, British S.P.R., 155 n<sup>1</sup>,  
 169 n<sup>2</sup>, 234 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Proceedings*, National Laboratory of  
 Psychical Research, 254 n<sup>2</sup>,  
 271 n<sup>1</sup>, 272 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Procès des Spirités*, 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Pruden, Mrs. Laura A., 162  
 Przbaram, K., 233  
 Pseudopod, meaning of, 142  
 'Psyche', 179 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Psyche*, 226 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Psychic child', 82-4  
 'Psychic factor', 11, 11 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Psychic Photography*, 180 n<sup>1</sup>, 208 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Psychic Photography (Magic Circle)*,  
 170 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Psychic Research*, 77 n<sup>2</sup>, 101 n<sup>1</sup>, 149 n<sup>2</sup>,  
 153 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Psychic Science*, 169 n<sup>4</sup>, 182 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Psychic Telephone, A*, 104 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Psychometry, meaning of, 141  
 Psychomotorometer, the, 124  
 Psykisk Oplysningsforening, 138  
 Pulborough, Sussex, 324  
 Püttner, R., 335  
 Quebec, 220, 222-4  
 Queen Mary College, London, 314  
 R 101 airship, 11, 12  
 Radio-active aids to 'spirit' photo-  
 graphy, 202-6  
*Radio-Active Compounds and Their  
 Use in Psychical Research*, 158 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Radio set, experiments with a, 237-  
 52  
 'Radiola' Company, Paris, 239-52  
 Radiovisor (Parent), Ltd, 231  
 'Rambow man, the', 154  
*Rambler's Recollections, A*, 256 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Rampling-Rose, W., 169, 169 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Rasmussen, Anna, 149, 149 n<sup>2</sup>  
 'Raw-head and bloody bones', 66  
 Raymond Lodge, 12, 12 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Raymond; or, Life After Death*, 12 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Raymond; Some Criticisms*, 12 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Reese, Bert, 289, 295  
*Regurgitation and the Duncan Medium-  
 ship*, 155 n<sup>2</sup>, 164 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Reichpost*, 233 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Reliquary prayer (for exorcising),  
 35  
 Repkow, Eyke von, 53  
*Report of an Investigation into Spirit-  
 Photography*, 169 n<sup>2</sup>

- Report of a Séance with David Duguid*, 168 n<sup>4</sup>  
*Report on Two Experimental Fire-Walks*, A, 380 n<sup>4</sup>  
*Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, 161 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Revelations of a Spirit Medium*, 254 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Review of Reviews*, 162  
*Revue Métapsychique*, 154 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Revue Spirite*, 168 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Reynolds, Gresham, 380 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Rhine (river), 335  
 Richards, Mrs. Henry, 35, 278-9  
 Richards, Webb, 358-9  
 Richet, Charles, 209, 269, 312  
 Ridley, Frederick, 272  
 Riek, Frederik, 329  
*Robert Heller, His Doings*, 255 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Robert-Houdin, Jean Eugène, 254  
 Robinson, H., 26-34  
 Robinson, H. Mansfield, 124-8  
 Robinson, W. E. ('Chung Ling Soo'), 163 n<sup>1</sup>, 200 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Rochas d'Aiglun, E. A. Albert de, 269, 269 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Rodinal, 173, 184, 208  
*Rolf of Mannheim*, 88 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Rolf ('talking' dog), 88, 88 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Romans, Jules, 312, 312 n<sup>1</sup>, 313, 318  
 Roman ghosts, 42-4  
 Romany charlatans, 326  
 Rome, 253 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Rome, Georgia, 269 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Romeo, 328  
 Rope Trick, 344-54  
 Roux, Monsieur, 77-80  
*Royal Magazine*, 269 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Royal Society of Medicine, 237  
*Rudi Schneider*, 152 n<sup>1</sup>, 163 n<sup>2</sup>, 228 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Rumanian medium, 71  
 'Russell, Arthur', spirit control, 131-9  
 Russell, A. S., 271 n<sup>4</sup>, 374  
 S.-G., J. S., 270 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Sachsenspiegel*, 53  
*St. Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, 368  
 St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College, 364  
 St. Germain, Boulevard, Paris, 80  
 St. Just, Zurich, 258, 298  
*St. Louis Globe Democrat*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
 St. Patrick's Channel, 95  
 Salusbury, F. G. H., 61-2  
 Salzburg, 288, 295  
 Sanguinetti, L. R., 154 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Santa Monica, California, 258  
*Sceptic, The*, 15  
 Schloss Falkenstein, 52-4  
 Schneider, Rudi, 87, 87 n<sup>1</sup>, 152, 226-36  
 Schneider, Willi, 150 n<sup>2</sup>, 226-7, 227 n<sup>1</sup>, 235, 241, 259, 259 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Schrenck-Notzing, Albert Freiherr von, 47, 152, 179, 179 n<sup>2</sup>, 226-8, 269, 269 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Science Siftings Annual*, 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Scientific American*, 203, 203 n<sup>1</sup>, 237  
*Scientists Plan a Signal Station to call Mars*, 128 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Scrying, meaning of, 142  
 Seabrook, W. B., 68 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Sealed chamber at Falkenstein, 53-4  
*Séance Table for the Study of Telekinesis*, A, 153 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Secret de la Cage Spirite*, 256 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Secrets of Stage Hypnotism*, 266 n<sup>2</sup>  
 'Sequah, the Great', 114 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Serangoon Road Temple, Singapore, 361  
 Shakespeare, William, 12, 37  
 Sheffield, 180  
 Shephard, J. B. H., 269  
 'Shooting' a ghost, 23  
*Short Title Catalogue*, 254 n<sup>2</sup>, 272 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Shrewsbury, 44  
 Shropshire bell 'phenomena', 38;  
     Roman ghosts, 42-4  
 Shropshire *Poltergeist*, 2, 15-24  
 'Silvester, Dr.', 271  
 Singapore, 356  
 Singapore fire-walking, 361-3  
 Sitwell, Sir George, 161

- Sleeping-car, haunted, 71-4  
 Smethwick, 129  
 Smith, Dr., 358  
 Smith, Edward, 55-64  
 'Smith, Hélène', 'Mars' medium,  
 117-8  
 Smith, the Misses, 55-64  
 Smith, Walter, 55-64  
 Smith, W. Whately, 241  
 Soal, S. G., 262, 272-7, 272 n<sup>2</sup>, 278-  
 85, 314, 373  
 Soap phenomenon, 32, 61-2  
 Société Française Radio-Électrique,  
 239 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Society for Psychical Research  
 (British), 155 n<sup>1</sup>, 169 n<sup>2,3</sup>, 202 n<sup>1</sup>,  
 234, 234 n<sup>2,4</sup>, 241  
 Somersetshire mansion, phenomena  
 in, 39-42  
*Some Revelations as to 'Raymond'*,  
 12 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Sorcellerie et la Science des Poisons, La*,  
 334 n<sup>1</sup>  
 South Africa, 170, 170 n<sup>2</sup>  
 South Downs, 324  
*South London Press*, 15 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Spandau (Berlin), 67  
 Sperry arc lamps, 130  
*Spirit Medium in a Motor Smash*,  
 112 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Spirit' photograph tricks, 172-208  
*Spirit Slate Writing*, 163 n<sup>1</sup>, 200 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Spiritualists and scientific investiga-  
 tion, 167  
 Spiritualists' National Union, 170  
*Spookland*, 179 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Spreck (river), Berlin, 67  
 Staglieno, Italy, 330  
 Stead, William T., 162  
 Stemschneider, Hermann, 351 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Stella C., 46, 46 n<sup>1</sup>, 47  
*Stella C.*, 46 n<sup>1</sup>  
 'Sterilising' medium, 100  
 Strand, London, 81  
*Strand Magazine*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>, 271 n<sup>2</sup>  
*Strange Ordeal, A*, 378 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Strange, True and Dreadful Relation*,  
 A, 70  
*Strong Man, The*, 270 n<sup>1</sup>  
*Study of Trance, Muscle Reading . . .*,  
 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Stumbling ghost, a, 15-24  
 Sturgess, E. M., 107-8  
 Stuttgart, 269 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Sudre, René, 101, 101 n<sup>1</sup>, 260  
 Suffolk Assizes, 322  
*Suggestion Magazine*, 255 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Sulphate of copper used for trick,  
 104-7  
 'Summerland', the, 12, 115  
*Sunday Dispatch*, 155 n<sup>2</sup>, 170  
*Supplementary Report on the Keeler-  
 Lee Photographs*, 171 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Surrey haunting, 44-6  
 Sussex love-tokens, 324-5  
 Svengalis, Three, 256, 256 n<sup>2</sup>, 266,  
 266 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Swift, Jonathan, 322  
 Swiss Alpine Club, 50  
 Sydenham, Lord, 378 n<sup>2</sup>  
 Sydney, N. S. W., 179 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Symington, H. W., 278-85  
 Symington, K., 280-5  
 Tactile clairvoyance, meaning of,  
 141  
 Tahra Bey, 309  
 Takapau, N.Z., 81  
 'Talking' animals, 85-97  
 Talking Mongoose, the, 85-97  
 Tarner Lectures, 11 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Taylor, L. W., 168 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Telegraphing to Mars, 129-30  
 Telepathy, meaning of, 142  
 Teleplasm, meaning of, 143; fraudu-  
 lent, 164  
 Temperature of fire in fire-walking,  
 375  
 Tennyson, Abel, 330  
 Terms used in psychical research,  
 meaning of, 141-3  
 Terriss, William, 46

- Thai Poosam (Hindu ceremony), 357
- Theatre ghosts, 46-7
- Theresa (Innsbruck), 288-95
- Theresienstrasse, Baden, 51-2
- Thermal variations cause 'knockings', 38-9
- Thinking Animals*, 88 n<sup>4</sup>
- Third International Congress for Psychical Research, 101
- Thurring, Hans, 71
- Thomalla, Curt, 306
- Thompson, Silvanus P., 194, 194 n<sup>1,2</sup>, 195
- Thought-Reader's Thoughts*, A, 255 n<sup>1</sup>
- Thought-Reading as a Case of Mutual Influence*, 270 n<sup>2</sup>
- Thought-transference, meaning of, 142
- Thousand and One Nights*, 88
- Three Svengalis (see Svengalis, Three)
- Tigurine (Zurich), 37 n<sup>1</sup>
- Tillet, Ben, 181
- Tillyard, R. J., 220-5
- Times*, *The*, 99, 99 n<sup>1</sup>, 356, 356 n<sup>1</sup>, 363, 365, 376, 376 n<sup>1</sup>, 380 n<sup>1</sup>
- Tipperary, 329
- 'Transfiguration' medium, 101-3
- Traumtänzerin Magdeleine G.*, 269 n<sup>1</sup>
- Trees, the (vaudeville telepathists), 256-7
- Trinity College, Cambridge, 11 n<sup>1</sup>
- Trucs du Médium Bénévol*, 256 n<sup>2</sup>
- Trumpet phenomena, meaning of, 143
- Two Adventures in Metapsychics*, 191 n<sup>2</sup>
- Two Worlds*, 157 n<sup>1,2</sup>, 170 n<sup>4</sup>
- Tyrol, 258, 286-96
- Tyrolean wonder-workers, 286-96
- Umbilo Temple, Natal, 356-9
- University College, Aberystwyth, 348
- University of London Council for Psychical Investigation, 9, 164 n<sup>2</sup>, 166, 168 n<sup>4</sup>, 170 n<sup>1,2</sup>, 272, 272 n<sup>1,2</sup>, 314, 348, 355, 363, 373, 380 n<sup>2</sup>
- Unknown Guest, The*, 88 n<sup>2</sup>, 227 n<sup>2</sup>
- Unorthodox London*, 269 n<sup>4</sup>
- Unser Welt*, 234 n<sup>2</sup>
- Unter den Linden, 13, 65-70, 322
- Uronium, 42 n<sup>1</sup>
- Uronium (Shropshire), 42
- Vampires, charm against, 328
- Vienna, 51-52, 71, 74, 168 n<sup>1</sup>, 233, 233 n<sup>1</sup>, 259
- Vienna University, 71
- Vinton, W. J., 233
- Virgil, 380 n<sup>1</sup>
- Viroconium (Shropshire), 42
- Vision Extra-Rétinienne*, 312, 318
- Voice Control Recorder, 164 n<sup>2</sup>
- Voisin, La, 334
- Voronoff, Serge, 326
- Vurgari, Bulgaria, 355 n<sup>1</sup>
- W— (market town), 25, 32-3
- Wagram, Avenue de, Paris, 333
- Walking Through Fire*, 365 n<sup>1</sup>
- Walpurgisnacht, 335, 340
- War of the Worlds, The*, 122, 122 n<sup>1</sup>
- Washington, D.C., 359 n<sup>1</sup>, 361 n<sup>1</sup>
- Waterbury watch-case, 21-4
- Waterhouse, E. S., 373
- Wax, melting, phenomenon, 77-80
- Wax, melting point of, 80 n<sup>1</sup>
- Weatherly, L. A., 270 n<sup>1</sup>
- Webb, Miss Nella, 266 n<sup>1</sup>
- Weiss, Ehrich, 321
- Weiss, Max, 319-21
- Wells, H. G., 122
- Welsh witch-doctors, 332
- Wenham, Jane, 323
- Wernigerode, 340-2
- West, Cyril, 55-64
- West, Mrs. Harold, 55-64
- West Saxons, 42



- Weyer, Oberösterreich, 235  
 Wheathampstead, Herts., 347-8  
 'Whirring wings' phenomenon, 40-2  
 'White Lady' of Falkenstein, 52-4  
 Williams, W. E., 348  
*Windsor Magazine*, 257 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Wine 'phenomena', 35  
 Wintergarten music-hall, Berlin, 68-9  
 Witchcraft and Vagrancy Acts, 98  
 Witchcraft in Germany, 334-43  
 Witchcraft, modern, 322-43  
 Witchcraft Ordinance, Kenya, 332  
 Witch-hunting in Harz, 341-2  
 Witkin, Dr., 357-9  
 'Wizard of the North', 254  
 Wolff, Doctor, 306  
 Wood, shrinking, causes 'phenomena', 38-9  
 Woodbridge, Suffolk, 28 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Worcester College, Oxford, 306  
 Wreckin, the (Shropshire), 44  
 Wright, Thomas, 42 n<sup>1</sup>  
 Wroxeter, Shropshire, 42  
 Würzburg, 74  
 X, Captain, 88-92  
 X, Madame ('eyeless sight'), 313  
 X, Madame (hysteriac), 131-9  
 X, Miss (clairvoyant), 61-2  
 X, Mr (Mars medium), 118-22  
 Xenoglossy, meaning of, 142  
 'X-ray vision', 312-21  
 Z, Doctor, 134-7  
 Z, Mrs. (Mars medium), 122-4  
 Zaayer, Marius J., 88 n<sup>4</sup>  
 Zancig, Julius, 254, 254 n<sup>1</sup>, 257  
 291  
 Zarif ('talking' horse), 88  
 Zomaha, the, 256, 256 n<sup>4</sup>, 257  
 Zugun, Eleonore, 63, 71, 209  
 Zurich, 37 n<sup>1</sup>, 258, 298











